

TITLE

A study of twelve- to thirteen-year-olds who are habitual, committed readers:
What, how and why they read, and the social and cultural factors which shape their
development

Gabrielle Cliff Hodges
Institute of Education, University of London

PhD Thesis

DECLARATION AND WORD COUNT

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how the readership of twelve- to thirteen-year-old readers who regularly read for a variety of purposes and pleasures is constructed. It offers a counterweight to the largely quantitative surveys of young people's reading which tend to cluster readers in broad categories; instead, it concentrates on individual readers' trajectories as they develop over time in the spaces created by their interrelation with trajectories of other readers and texts. The aim is to create a rich and complex description of readers showing the effects of different social interactions and cultural values on the changing dynamics of their reading.

The research was initiated within a high-achieving English class as they moved from Year 8 into Year 9 in a rural comprehensive school. Four research methods were designed to generate data: students created collages to chart formative events in their reading histories, engaged in semi-structured small-group interviews conducted by the researcher, carried out semi-structured interviews with a parent, carer or grandparent and wrote journals during their independent reading of a self-selected book. Data analysis included a variety of procedures to enable close, critical reading of the material generated and the tracing of readers' trajectories.

The study is intended to make an original contribution to the understanding of all those concerned with young people's reading in the context of secondary education in particular by bringing together different theoretical perspectives – not only the social and cultural but also the spatial and historical – exploring insights and tensions arising from their juxtaposition. Because of the deliberate focus on the distinctiveness of individual readers, my intention is not to produce generalisable results but a reconfiguration of material which offers fresh perspectives on young readers and a methodology which will be replicable in other contexts.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The study, the research and the thesis

A major aim of this study is to explore the intricacies of young people as readers in their early teenage years. It is often a decisive period in many readers' development as they expand their horizons and mature into adulthood. The research I undertook deliberately focuses attention on those who regularly read for a variety of purposes and pleasures rather than those who do not. I am interested to discover what representation of reading might be brought into relief when evidence is collected from those who count reading as a worthwhile pursuit amongst the many other activities in which they engage, rather than those for whom reading appears to be of more marginal interest and value. Perhaps the most distinctive argument I seek to present in this thesis is that individual readers have their own trajectories, constantly under transformation as they develop over time and in correlation with other people's. If those trajectories are what come under scrutiny, might readers find themselves less likely to be classified according to gender, achievement or motivation and more likely to be recognised by the ways in which they practise reading, as dynamic, complex individuals? If so, what implications might there be, for the readers themselves and for those with responsibility for this aspect of young people's development in school and in the wider community beyond?

Habitual and committed readers

I use the phrase *habitual and committed readers* to refer to people who consciously include reading amongst the range of activities with which they voluntarily occupy their time. I am not simply referring to anyone who only chooses to read, nor to anyone who might be considered by others as high-achieving, precocious or bookish. Rather, I am interested in those who have discovered what Marcel Proust describes as the 'incitements' of reading (Proust, 1971, p. 35), who choose to read regularly and with some measure of sustained attention because, for whatever reason, it seems to them to be worth their while. My study focuses on young readers who, in the words of William Burford, translator and editor of Proust's *On reading*, 'turn books to [their] own account' (*ibid.*, p. vi). The notion of habituation implies purposeful, intellectual

engagement; the notion of commitment implies conscious intention. In *Democracy and education*, John Dewey notes:

Any habit marks an inclination – an active preference and choice for the conditions involved in its exercise. A habit does not wait, Micawber-like, for a stimulus to turn up so that it may get busy; it actively seeks for occasions to pass into full operation (Dewey, 1916, p. 46).

From the outset, I have also been concerned to explore whatever reading matter young people actively choose and want to discuss, to work with a broad definition of *reading* including fiction, non-fiction, comics, magazines, graphic novels, computer games, newspapers and websites. Although their reading does, indeed, range widely, what has most frequently and, indeed, most feelingly been talked about, is narrative, especially (though not exclusively) narrative fiction. Its particular appeal for the readers in my study is one of the many aspects of reading that will be explored in some depth within this thesis.

In my consideration of habitual and committed readers, therefore, the emphasis is not so much on the quantity, frequency or perceived quality of their reading but on their active interest and the dynamics of their *readership*. Etymologically, with the roots of its suffix *-ship* in Old English *scieppan* meaning to shape, readership suggests creative agency on the part of the reader, something needing to be worked on and brought into being, not merely a fixed state. Another of its common meanings denotes groups of readers with a shared interest in the same text such as, for example, the readership of different newspapers. In the context of this thesis, I use the term to refer to an abstract notion, shaped not only in and through the social interactions involved in reading, but also through negotiating cultural values such as attitudes towards and acquisition of reading material, relations with other readers' opinions, critical engagement with a range of concepts such as authorship, publishing and so on.

Social interactions and cultural values

My title indicates the theoretical bases in which the study is rooted. I am not solely interested in what readers read, but also in the *social interactions* and *cultural values* which motivate their ongoing experience of reading. I take social interactions to mean reading activities which are meaningful for all participants

(i.e. teachers *and* students, parents *and* children) not just for one or the other. I take cultural values to be abstract ideas about reading, mediated through artefacts which may be conceptual or material (Cole, 1990). They are often highly contested and susceptible to negotiation, providing settings – attitudinal or aspirational, real or imagined – within which social interactions take place. The research therefore investigates young people’s social experience of reading as it is enacted and understood by them in conjunction with other readers around them and through their cultural engagement with how it is more broadly conceptualised for example in the values inscribed in institutions such as schools, publishing houses or the media. My thesis therefore draws on aspects of Lev Vygotsky’s sociocultural theorising as well as reader-response theories expounded by Louise Rosenblatt (1938/1995; 1978/1994) and Wolfgang Iser (1978), acknowledging the understanding that reading is always enacted in sociocultural contexts.

My own position as a teacher educator in the field of secondary English teaching is another factor informing the way this study has been developed. My pedagogy has been shaped by sociocultural theories of learning and teaching, in particular the work of Vygotsky (1986) and Jerome Bruner (1966; 1986; 1996) who synthesise the psychological and social with the cultural, the textual and the pedagogical. Their work, and how it has influenced both the design of the research and analysis of the data, forms a key part of my thesis. In terms of teaching reading across all phases of the secondary English curriculum, I have found Robert Scholes’s work on textual studies and reading deeply engaging (Scholes, 1985; 1989; 1998; 2001), in particular his arguments about how, pragmatically, theory and practice can be brought together in the classroom to develop readers who exercise textual power in their reading and their lives. Because I hope the outcome of my research will inform English pedagogy, it was always my intention to initiate this study within an English classroom, though some of the data were generated in contexts beyond the school.

The spatial and historical

The topic of reading is wide-ranging and always verges on the elusive. As the study gradually began to take shape, two additional perspectives therefore became increasingly important as means by which to focus and structure the research. These perspectives I have called the *spatial* and the *historical*. As I explain in

greater depth below, I take the spatial perspective to mean one which involves the interplay between space *and* time, between the contiguities *and* the temporalities of reading. I take the historical perspective to mean one which, whilst obviously involving the temporal, focuses specifically on studying human past time, whether of individuals or groups. I aimed to see whether a close affiliation between these perspectives and the social and cultural, might lead to different constructions of readers and reading from those commonly adhered to by English teachers. Sociocultural theories of reading are not new and, as already stated, articulate with theories of reader-response (Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994); they are less often married with the kind of textual studies (Scholes, 1985; 1989) which are central to this thesis. Likewise, bringing spatial and historical perspectives to bear on reading is not new: time-space (the *chronotope*) plays a central role in Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the dialogic imagination (Bakhtin, 1981), and autobiographies of ordinary readers have long been studied by historians of reading to learn more about how people used to read and how reading has been perceived in the past (Altick, 1957; Vincent, 1981; Rose, 2001). However, bringing all four perspectives together to see what different vantage points are afforded within the context of young people's reading provides a new departure. My research therefore promises to be distinctive within the field of English teaching in its intention to explore what happens when social, cultural, spatial and historical perspectives are brought to bear on reading, informed by ideas not only from education and textual studies but cultural geography and reading history as well.

Research questions

Two groups of questions were addressed in the research. The first set comprised substantive questions about the orientation of young readers: their motivation, the manner of their reading, their perception of the material they read and the social and cultural circumstances of their readership. They implied certain epistemological stances and theoretical viewpoints which I discuss below. The questions were:

- 1) Why and how do these habitual, committed readers read?
- 2) How do they construe the material they read?
- 3) Through what social interactions and by what cultural values is their readership shaped?

The wording of the questions anticipated the social constructionist approach to researching readers, reading and readership I took, using data generated by a specific group of individual readers. I was interested to see how the interpretation of the data might enable constructions to be raised which would prompt different ways of thinking about young readers. In particular, I wanted the research to provoke pedagogical reflection, to which end there was a subsidiary set of questions. Though connected with the questions above, these were more methodological questions; they, too, had epistemological origins but their role was as much to do with the design as the substantive content of the research. The questions were:

- 4) How does interpreting the data from spatial perspectives affect the construction of readers, reading and readership?
- 5) How does taking a historical perspective illuminate contemporary young readers, reading and readership?

Research context

The research involved a mixed class of twelve- to thirteen-year-old students in a rural comprehensive school which I call Cornford Village College. (Here and throughout, I use the term *student* rather than *pupil* to refer to the young readers participating in the research. I do so because the etymology and connotations of *student* have more association with agency and motivation than the word *pupil*.) The school is one of Henry Morris's village colleges, the earliest of which were established in the 1920s and 1930s in Cambridgeshire which was then the second poorest county in England (Jeffs, 1998). The villages in which these schools are situated are now relatively affluent, many with populations of several thousand. Most have a number of small businesses as well as shops, pubs, places of worship, healthcare and library facilities. Active village websites keep people up to date with social events or current concerns and offer them the opportunity to share their views. Whilst some residents work within the villages or from home, others commute to work in the nearby university city or neighbouring towns. Although Cornford Village College draws students from Cornford itself, many also travel in from surrounding villages. Students generally achieve very good academic results and the school appears to be popular. The current principal is keen to retain the relatively intimate atmosphere of a rural school but is also outward-looking and

ambitious for the school to be reckoned with in terms of student performance and as a player in the ever-shifting and highly competitive world of specialist schools, trusts, federations and academies. There are plentiful opportunities for students to be involved in extra-curricular activities and staff work hard to organise a variety of trips and exchanges. Since the great majority of Cornford students are White British heritage (as was reflected within the research sample), the exchanges in particular are an important chance for them to develop acquaintances with young people from other cultural and geographical contexts.

It is probably true to say that despite the school's success, Henry Morris's original ideals from his 1925 Memorandum have dimmed somewhat, for example his vision that the village college would 'abolish the duality of education and ordinary life. It would not only be the training ground for the art of living, but the place in which life is lived, the environment of a genuine corporate life' (Rée, 1973, p. 154). Like most schools in the country, Cornford has felt the need to keep pace with changing ideology which has tended to emphasise competition and achievement more than cohesion and integration. Morris's belief in concentrating educational and cultural resources in some of the county's larger villages stemmed from his realisation that rural poverty was forcing people to leave the countryside to live in urban areas. Villages were thus stagnating culturally and the village colleges, with their commitment to involve local people actively – educationally, culturally and even in terms of health and well-being – were set up as a direct response (Rée, 1973; Jeffs, 1998). Although this school, like the other village colleges, has always had a strong community education programme, accommodating a variety of daytime and evening classes, it is no longer as fully integrated or vibrant as it has been in the past.

As for Cornford village itself, the 2001 census gives the unemployment statistic as slightly above 2% and the school's most recent Ofsted report also describes the area as one where there are relatively low levels of socioeconomic disadvantage. Information about parental occupations for students in the sample was deliberately not sought (for reasons discussed in Chapter 4) though the data nevertheless include some references to work which suggest alignment with the census. References within the data to family holidays abroad, purchase of books and magazines, and access to computers in the home, also seem to confirm the area's

socioeconomic status. In the casual terminology of the media and, indeed, of colleagues in education, the village could easily be deemed a 'leafy suburb', a phrase sometimes used to refer to certain levels of affluence and comfortable lifestyle. However, the term acts as a barrier to understanding because it homogenises the locality and its inhabitants as uniformly and materially privileged whilst ignoring particularities, and what the young people in this project have most in common is their distinctiveness, as becomes clear when I turn to the data analysis and discussion later on. Furthermore, students in the sample came from two other towns and eleven other villages, only three of them being residents of Cornford itself. Many of those other villages are much smaller than Cornford with an equally wide range of housing and a diversity of employment and income levels. They are very different in character, depending for example on their positioning in relation to the growth and decline of the railway, or on the vicissitudes of farming. It is unwise, therefore, to generalise.

Thesis overview

Having offered an introduction to my research and the impetus for it, I move on in Chapter 2 to discuss theoretical literature which has informed my thinking and shaped the study. In Chapter 3, I justify the methodological basis of the research whilst in Chapter 4 I rationalise the research design. Chapters 5 to 8 present an analysis of the data generated by the four research methods, discussed in the light of the study's theoretical perspectives. Finally, in Chapter 9 I reflect on the research as a whole and consider its potential contribution to the field of reading within secondary English teaching.

2 ENGAGEMENT WITH SELECTED THEORETICAL LITERATURE

In this chapter I engage critically with literature which has informed the study overall. In particular, I discuss works by writers whose ideas have influenced my own thinking over time and given rise to many further questions about readers and the act of reading, teachers and the teaching of reading, narrative and the allure of fiction. These works have also been selected because the theories and approaches they address underpin the design of the research, especially the pedagogic impulses of the research methods. Two further strands of literature influenced the shape of the research: one involves recent theorising about interconnections between space and time, the other histories of reading. I discuss key texts from both these areas to justify bringing spatial and historical perspectives alongside the social and cultural. As I hope will become clear from the discussion below, there are several connections to be made between these works although interestingly not many of them are made explicitly by the writers themselves.

Reading as transaction and action

Although Wolfgang Iser is often proclaimed as one of the pioneers of reader-response theory which privileges in varied ways the role of the reader in the construction of the text, Louise Rosenblatt was outlining a very similar theory considerably earlier. Whilst neither explicitly acknowledges the other's work, they engage in related phenomenological debates about reading, critiquing in particular Roman Ingarden's ideas about the literary work of art (Ingarden, 1973a; 1973b). His argument that a literary work of art be seen as *intentional* – created by an author and requiring a reader for its reproduction, an entity brought into being by consciousness albeit neither entirely *real* nor *ideal* – and what they perceive to be its strengths and limitations as a concept, was influential in shaping their own individual arguments for the importance of the reader's role in the process of reading. However, whilst their work was prompted by similar literary dilemmas, Rosenblatt's was also explicitly provoked by the perceived threat to American democracy in the late 1930s and her concern that traditional approaches to the teaching of literature were likewise repressing readers' potential democracy. In 1938, four decades before Iser's *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response* (Iser, 1978), Rosenblatt published *Literature as exploration* (Rosenblatt,

1938/1995), a text still influential within the teaching of literature today. In it, she justifies the term 'transaction' as a metaphor for a different view of reading:

In response to developments in the philosophy of science, transaction is being used to designate a process in which the elements are aspects of a total situation. The underlying metaphor is organic, as in the ecological view of human beings in a reciprocal relation with the natural environment (*ibid.*, p. 26).

Rosenblatt's later work, *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work* (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994) offers an even fuller explication of her theories of the reader's role in the construction of literary texts and of the equal importance of all elements in the process: the reader, the text produced by the author, and the virtual work created by the transaction.

Of particular significance to my own work is the fact that her theorising stems from reflections on readings of texts studied in her classes over many years by graduate and undergraduate students. There are several potentially crucial pedagogical implications of her ideas. Firstly, her identification of two particular forms of reading, the *effere*nt and the *aesthetic*, offers a way to analyse individual readings premised on readers as active, feeling participants during and after the process itself. Rosenblatt makes clear distinctions between the *effere*nt and *aesthetic* in order to draw attention to them, but also stresses the importance of recognising their interdependence. *Efferent* reading, she suggests, involves that which readers take away from the text to inform subsequent thinking or actions. *Aesthetic* reading, on the other hand, is what is felt and lived through at the point of reading itself in relation to a particular text. Her argument is that whether an *effere*nt or *aesthetic* reading occurs depends on the stance adopted by the reader, an idea which offers rich insights for both teachers of reading and readers themselves. Secondly, Rosenblatt's notion of the *poem* (or imagined work) which is created as a result of the interaction between text and reader, but which is not the same as either of them, emphasises the distinctiveness of each person's reading experience. It throws into question the hegemony of the *text*, lending support instead to the idea of authorised readings. Nevertheless, because these are dependent upon the text, usually with attendant awareness of the text's author and literary/historical contexts, and (in a classroom anyway) on discussion with fellow readers, there can be a multiplicity of interpretations, but not necessarily (or not

often, at least) entirely idiosyncratic readings. Rosenblatt describes texts and their producers thus:

The text of a poem or of a novel or a drama is like a musical score. The artist who created the score – composer or poet – has set down notations for others, to guide them in the production of a work of art (*ibid.*, p. 13).

Not just the text, therefore, but also its author are entities exerting some force on the reading process, even if not controlling it completely. She also suggests, very importantly, that the text created by the reading process be seen as an *event in time*, susceptible to revision in the light of other such events which jostle with it, whether constructed by different readers or by the same reader but at a different time. She does not make reference to Stanley Fish, who in 1970 had critiqued in very similar terms the affective and intentional fallacies to which literary criticism were prone. Reflecting ten years later on this same essay, he suggests that part of the problem with traditional formalist approaches was that the text's '(apparently) spatial form belied the temporal dimension in which its meanings were actualized' (Fish, 1980, p. 2). He later elaborates his belief in the temporal as part of the very essence of reading, arguing – like Rosenblatt – for use of the term *event*:

For me, reading (and comprehension in general) is an event, no part of which is to be discarded. In that event, which is the actualisation of meaning, the deep structure plays an important role, but it is not everything; for we comprehend not in terms of the deep structure alone but in terms of a *relationship* between the unfolding, in time, of the surface structure and a continual checking of it against our projection (always in terms of surface structure) of what the deep structure will reveal itself to be; and when the final discovery has been made and *the* deep structure is perceived, all the "mistakes" – the positing, on the basis of incomplete evidence, of deep structures that failed to materialize – will not be canceled out. They have been experienced; they have existed in the mental life of the reader; they *mean* (*ibid.*, p. 48).

Fish's point that we should not ask what a text *means* so much as what a text *does* is cleverly illustrated by reading four lines from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, enacting how the encounter with the words is integral to the construction of meaning: the process of reading *happens* and it makes meaning *happen*.

The notion of the reading process as a dynamic one is also central to Iser's thinking. Whilst Iser's work on reader-response is situated within a largely

philosophical tradition of literary theory, his ideas have been influential in education because they offer theoretical justification for the kinds of practice many literature teachers strive to achieve, especially in classrooms where literary study is seen as a democratic entitlement for all students, not merely those who seek to pursue it voluntarily at the post-compulsory stage. In his preface to *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response* (Iser, 1978), Iser states what might well stand as a key aim for many literature teachers, namely:

... one task of a theory of aesthetic response is to facilitate intersubjective discussion of individual interpretations. Clearly, such an intention is a reaction to the spreading dissatisfaction arising out of the fact that text interpretation has increasingly become an end in itself (*ibid.*, p. x).

In classrooms where teachers (like Rosenblatt) set store by individual students' readings of texts, such an invitation is welcome. Continuing to outline the rudiments of his theory, Iser summarises how he perceives the relative roles of author, reader and text:

... the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic pole is the author's text and the aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader. In view of this polarity, it is clear that the work itself cannot be identical with the text or with the concretization, but must be situated somewhere between the two. It must inevitably be virtual in character, as it cannot be reduced to the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader, and it is from this virtuality that it derives its dynamism. As the reader passes through the various perspectives offered by the text and relates the different views and patterns to one another he sets the work in motion, and so sets himself in motion, too (*ibid.*, p. 21).

By distinguishing, yet connecting, the artistry of the author and the aesthetic imagining of the reader, Iser arrives at a slightly different point from Rosenblatt, but one which shares with her the idea that the work established as a result of the reading process is not detached from the text created by the author. Furthermore, Iser's use of the term *artistry* accords the author status as someone who practises a particular skill, deliberately producing something (not just randomly generating anything) with which readers may engage. To be more precise, the author works within a textual *repertoire* such as the novel, adopting particular *strategies* (artistry, perhaps) to create a text which requires a reader for its realisation. His argument that the reader sets the work, and also himself, in motion and that the work must, of necessity, be virtual, combines two critically important

presuppositions: that readers are motivated and that reading is creative, ideas which form a key element of this thesis.

A further implication of Iser's notion of the virtual created work is that the text therefore cannot be the same as its meaning. The notion that a text and its meaning are concomitant is a misconception that has often bedevilled literary work in secondary English classrooms, not least where its end has been a public examination and it becomes all too easy for teachers and students to revert, under pressure, to the quest for single meanings and right answers. What Iser offers instead are arguments why this cannot be the case:

... literary texts initiate 'performances' of meaning rather than actually formulating meanings themselves. Their aesthetic quality lies in this 'performing' structure, which clearly cannot be identical to the final product, because without the participation of the individual reader there can be no performance (*ibid.*, p. 27).

Later, quoting Jean-Paul Sartre's idea that 'the process of writing, however, includes as a dialectic correlative the process of reading, and these two interdependent acts require two differently active people' (Sartre cited in Iser, 1978, p.108), he refines his concept of the author-reader relationship to encompass distinctiveness yet connection. But two major questions remain, notably what are texts for and what is the motivation required by any reader to set the reading process in motion? Iser's answer is that textual realisations have a reality which complements lived reality in the world. Referring specifically to the idea of a literary text, Iser argues that it offers readers the opportunity to 'transcend the limitations of their own real-life situation; it is not a reflection of any given reality, but it is an extension or broadening of their own reality' (*ibid.*, p. 79). The idea of transcendence is imbued with connotations of higher rather than different values. Others would diverge from this perspective. For example, in *The redress of poetry* Seamus Heaney offers a similar but essentially more democratic suggestion about literature, in this case poetry:

Its projections and inventions should be a match for the complex reality which surrounds it and out of which it is generated ... As long as the co-ordinates of the imagined thing correspond to those of the world that we live in and endure, poetry is fulfilling its counterweighting function (Heaney, 1995, p. 8).

Despite the difference in values, however, Heaney and Iser share a commitment to the motivating function of literature: its potential for readers to recognise the distinctions and connections between real and imagined worlds.

At this point I turn my attention to another influential thinker in the field, Robert Scholes, whose work informs many aspects of this study. His career as researcher and teacher of English in American universities spans more than half a century and, like Rosenblatt, his theories stem from the exigencies of the classroom. *The nature of narrative*, first published in 1966, still in print forty years on in a revised edition (Scholes, Phelan and Kellogg, 2006), arose from discussion with a co-lecturer about a taught course on narrative from Homer to Joyce. Scholes's interest in various twentieth century literary forms led to further courses and writing on modernism, structuralism and, latterly, postmodernism, especially magical realism. However, it is his writings on, and commitment to, the profession of English teaching that have influenced the main strands of my own current work. In 1985 he published *Textual power* (Scholes, 1985), the first of four texts I discuss. Substituting his own terms – *genre* and *style* – for Iser's *repertoire* and *strategy*, Scholes here is concerned to show the interrelationship of the roles of reader and writer and, crucially, to question what textual study is for. Although, he agrees with Iser that 'reading and writing are important because we read and write our world as well as our texts, and are read and written by them in turn' (*ibid.*, p. xi), and argues that textual activity provides a means to *reflect* on the world, he goes even further, stressing that textual activity is a means by which to *act* within and upon the world, hence to acquire textual power. He arrives at this conclusion via his analysis of what he argues are three essential elements of textual study: reading, interpretation and criticism. Although each has a vital role to play, it is criticism, according to Scholes, which brings the student to maturity because, like writing itself, it is 'a way of discovering how to choose, how to take some measure of responsibility for ourselves and for our world' (*ibid.*, p. 73). To take a critical stance, furthermore, is neither to pin down world- or word-meanings, nor to fabricate them; rather it is to interact with them. Like Iser and Heaney, Scholes addresses what he believes to be the purpose of textual study. He uses the science fiction of Ursula Le Guin as his example, but might perhaps argue the same for any literature:

When science fiction really works it does not domesticate the alien but alienates the domestic. It takes us on journeys where we meet the alien and find that he is us. If Le Guin is right, it is only after such a voyage of alienation that we might hope to be reconciled to our own humanity (*ibid.*, p. 128).

Where Iser suggests reading literature as a way of *transcending* reality and Heaney offers the idea of its serving a *counterweighting* function to reality, Scholes argues that literature offers readers *reconciliation* with reality. To that end, he is always mindful of the part teaching plays in this process, helping students to learn about the textualised nature of the world and how they can themselves engage with the multiple discourses with which it is woven: as readers and writers, interpreters and critics, in other words as human beings who have textual power.

In his next book, *The protocols of reading* (Scholes, 1989), Scholes meditates further on his subject, focusing closely on the notion of agency. For him, the act of reading is not an end in itself, but one which leads to further action in the real world:

Reading, though it may be a kind of action, is not the whole action but a part of it, remaining incomplete unless and until it is absorbed and transformed in the thoughts and deeds of readers. I believe that reading should answer to social and ethical concerns (*ibid.*, p. x).

Scholes's leanings towards structuralism, however, and the visceral pleasure he clearly derives from textual study, suggest that for him reading is very much more than a means to an ethical end. Rather, the ethical (and thus political) life is created by dialectical reading, motivated by 'centripetal and centrifugal impulses' (*ibid.*, p. 8) in the attempt to overcome difference, whether it be the difference between authors and readers or words and worlds. But the distinction between the literary and the real world remains, turning as it does on one key point: the ability to act. Referring to one of the great nineteenth century realist novels, *Middlemarch*, he sums up:

No matter how strongly we feel about Bulstrode, Casaubon, Dorothea Brooke or any other character in *Middlemarch*, we cannot act in that world. We can only read, interpret and criticize. When we connect the text of the book to the text of our lives, however, the world of choice and action opens before us (*ibid.*, p. 151).

Scholes has addressed earlier, in his discussion of some of Stanley Fish's and Jacques Derrida's ideas, the problem of overly metaphysical theories, namely their avoidance of what he here describes as the 'pragmatic presence' (*ibid.*, p. 73). His argument appears to be fuelled by his work as a teacher, not just critic or theorist, which demands – ethically – that you live by what you profess. In his later work, *The rise and fall of English* (Scholes, 1998) he writes of the challenge issued to him by teachers working with American high school English studies students in their final years of schooling, to design a 'capstone' course which will 'enable students to use all they have learned in their previous years of study, and ... help them to realize how that learning connects to the lives they hope to live' (*ibid.*, p. 130). Needless to say, the course Scholes devises aims to increase students' textual power but does not limit this power to the ability to understand how texts such as a Shakespeare play, for example, work:

... it also includes the ability to respond, to talk back, to analyze, to extend, to take one's own textual position in relation to Shakespeare – or any kind of text. Shakespeare wants audiences whose love of language and ability to respond to it matches his own textual power (*ibid.*, p. 131).

In other words, Scholes is mindful of both teachers and students who, pragmatically, in each other's presence, engage in a process of textual study which is incomplete if it is not both evaluative and generative, receptive and creative, responsive and productive. His emphasis on textual (rather than merely literary) study includes a deep concern that students should be creative writers as well as creative readers. For Scholes, learning the craft of the writer through writing is as essential for textual power as is learning the craft of reading through reading. However, he indicates the particular importance he accords to the latter, invoking Keats's famous description of the spider's web of creative reading, by stating that: 'the human reader thereby creates a "tapestry" that depends upon a few previous texts but is the reader's own creation, offering solace and stimulus' (*ibid.*, p. 165). Such a comment typifies much of Scholes's work in which however scholarly the dialectic, the affective dimension is never overlooked, nor the democratic principle that everyone is entitled to textual study, to reading, interpretation and criticism.

The last of his four books I discuss, *The crafty reader*, explores reading as a craft rather than an art, an activity which ‘connects literature to life’ (Scholes, 2001, p. 12). Scholes articulates what he means, characterising the craft of reading as a process which ‘expects readers to read as different individuals and admits that poems, like other texts, may both please and persuade – that they might be for use and not merely for contemplation’ (*ibid.*, p. 27), the latter being, he argues, their prime purpose within the New Critical movement. Through discussion of his own readings of a variety of popular cultural texts, Scholes echoes and enacts the intention he professes in all the four works I have discussed, namely:

... to connect the ordinary with the extraordinary: the humble text with the exalted text, the sacred with the profane, the common reader with the uncommon writer, and the common writer with the uncommon reader (*ibid.*, p. 138).

His reference to (un)common readers anticipates ideas central to theories of reading which I discuss further below. Meanwhile, having discussed works which have shaped my thinking about the dynamics of the reading process and readers’ active engagement with the texts they read and the worlds they inhabit, I next turn to writers whose ideas have impacted on my deliberations about what young people read and how various social and cultural forces shape their readership.

Reading as social interaction and cultural engagement

In his well-known essay, ‘Two modes of thought’, Bruner cuts through the difficulties of defining the term narrative by stating that he will concern himself with ‘narrative, so to speak, at its far reach: as an art form’ (Bruner, 1986, p. 15). Here he is not at odds with Scholes’s literary-textual, art-craft distinctions; it is merely that, from a cognitive perspective, he is coming at the problem armed with the concept of story-making as one of two ways in which human beings think. He does not appear to go as far as some others have more recently done in the light of emerging neuroscientific studies (Turner, 1996), to make claims that language stems from literary thought rather than the other way round as is more usually asserted. He fully endorses, however, the significance of narrative because of its potential to offer readers a vantage point from which to think about their lives. One of his most interesting insights is to apply the grammatical concept of subjunctivity to the reading of narrative, explaining that the *what if* of the subjunctive mood as distinct from the *what is* of the indicative mood offers no less

than the reader's active involvement in the rewriting of the story; it affords 'play for the reader's imagination' (Bruner, 1986, p. 35) and because that results (following Rosenblatt and Iser) in a new text, it implies the agency of the reader is inextricably linked with writing and thought.

However, Bruner has also reiterated the essentially social and cultural nature of not just reading, but education as a whole, in many different works over several decades. In *Towards a theory of instruction* (Bruner, 1966) he argues that in order to be educative, the teacher must engage with students in ways I have earlier defined as 'social', that is be a 'day-to-day working model with whom to interact. It is not so much that the teacher provides a model to *imitate*. Rather, it is that the teacher can become a part of the student's internal dialogue' (*ibid.*, p. 124). Reciprocity, he continues, 'involves a deep human need to respond to others and to operate jointly with them toward an objective' (*ibid.*, p. 125). The educative potential of collaboration is expanded upon in *Actual minds, possible worlds*, this time in relation to culture, for example in his characterisation of culture not merely as a set of rules for action but as a forum in which meanings can be negotiated:

It is the forum aspect of a culture that gives its participants a role in constantly making and remaking the culture – an *active* role as participants rather than as performing spectators who play out their canonical roles according to rule when the appropriate cues occur (Bruner, 1986, p. 123).

In a later work, *Culture and education* (Bruner, 1996), the same idea about making meaning collaboratively is embedded in the series of tenets which he offers as a guide to a theory of education (not just instruction). The notion manifests itself as interactions between culture and mind as well as between teacher and learner in the classroom. The emphasis on reciprocity remains pivotal and it is not therefore surprising to find Bruner's ideas (in connection with those of Bakhtin and Vygotsky) informing a great deal of sociocultural work on aspects of teaching and learning such as the pedagogic and cognitive implications of certain kinds of classroom discussion (Gee, 1992; Mercer, 2000; Nystrand, 2006; Alexander, 2008b). Ways in which sociocultural perspectives inform this study are discussed further in Chapter 4 when the design of the research is addressed.

Reading spatially

Crucial to my study is the imperative that reading also be viewed from spatial perspectives, with the spatial being taken to include the temporal as well. Any reading experience thus perceived is immediately complex. For example, a reader may not only be reading about the *concept* of time, as for example in a novel such as *Tom's Midnight Garden* (Pearce, 1958), or about a *period* of time such as the early twentieth century, but actively constructing *imaginary* time and space within *actual* time and space as well. Here, for example, is Virginia Woolf in role as a 'common reader', being swept up by the exhilarating passion of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847):

Nor is this exhilaration short-lived. It rushes us through the entire volume, without giving us time to think, without letting us lift our eyes from the page. So intense is our absorption that if someone moves in the room the movement seems to take place not there but up in Yorkshire. The writer has us by the hand, forces us along her road, makes us see what she sees, never leaves us for a moment or allows us to forget her (Woolf, 1925/1984, p. 156).

The reader's energy is devoted to imagining the time and space of the novel (a fictional north of England in the early nineteenth century) at the expense of the time and space in which she bodily exists (an actual room somewhere, in the 1920s). Indeed, Woolf describes her relationship with Brontë, in the moment of reading, as physically closer – as if being held by the hand, travelling the same road, seeing with the author's eyes – than to the 'someone' who is there in the room where she reads.

Some discussions, such as Fish's to which I have already referred, tend to treat space and time as alternately in the ascendant. Fish claims that he had 'escaped formalism by displacing attention from the text, in its spatial configurations, to the reader and his temporal experience' (Fish, 1980, p. 4). A slightly different stance, adopted more recently by some theorists such as Edward Soja (2004), is one in which spatial analysis is used to balance the emphasis on temporal (specifically historical) thinking in social theory. Writing in the preface to a compilation of pieces which explore various ways of applying spatial theory to literacy research and practice, Soja appears on the one hand to be arguing for what he calls 'transdisciplinary diffusion' (*ibid.*, p. xi) and, on the other hand, to be asserting the need to privilege the spatial since he senses the historical remains an overly

powerful force. Margaret Sheehy and Kevin Leander, in the same volume, likewise argue for literacy practice to be conceived of as spatial practice as distinct from being situated in material places (Sheehy and Leander, 2004). My own interest within this study, however, is what happens when different kinds of thinking (or theoretical perspectives) are used to analyse the data in conjunction with one another rather than as opposites.

An influential conception of the conjunction of time and space in narrative (specifically the novel) inscribed by the writer and re-created by the reader, is Bakhtin's *chronotope*:

The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative ... All the novel's abstract elements – philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect – gravitate towards the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 250).

Bakhtin is careful to emphasise the mutual relationship between time and space, arguing that they are intrinsically connected, but never merged. His lucid exemplification of chronotopes in the novel – for example, the *encounter*, the *road*, the *castle*, the *parlour* or *salon*, the *provincial town*, the *threshold* – informs a powerful argument for the concept as central to his poetics of 'prose-art' (*ibid.*, p. 276). However, an equally important aspect of Bakhtin's poetics of the novel, likewise relevant to the spatial theory on which my research is based, is the concept he terms *heteroglossia*. He characterises heteroglossia as the multiplicity of voices out of which a novel is constructed, the way they are stratified artistically within the novel, and their dialogic relationships:

The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types ... and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions ... These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization – this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel (*ibid.*, p. 263).

Central to the dialogic nature of the novel's artistry thus conceived are the centripetal and centrifugal forces at work (chiming with Scholes's notion of the

dialectical reader acting on centripetal and centrifugal impulses, already referred to earlier) and, in the words of Bakhtin's editor and translator Michael Holquist, heteroglossia is 'as close a conceptualisation as possible of that locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide' (*ibid.*, p. 428). This notion of a 'locus' created from the tension between different forces and multiple voices provides a connection between Scholes's textual theory, Bakhtin's theory of the novel and cultural geographer Doreen Massey's conceptualisation of space to which I turn next. It also connects with the design of my own research which aimed to consider the plurality of a group of readers and the space created by their interrelationships with other readers.

Massey is a theorist whose work offers a distinctive way of connecting the spatial and the temporal. Whilst she refers to literary theory, she is not overtly concerned with theories of reading; nevertheless, her ideas have considerable light to shed on the reading process. Her work develops out of a background in cultural geography, social theory and philosophy. As a cultural geographer, she is interested in relationships between social practices, cultural values, language and ideas, specifically, in how they transform, and are transformed by, the places and spaces within which they are played out. I refer later on to her ideas about imagining the field in research as a linguistic construction (Massey, 2003) and the need, therefore, for researchers to address explicitly how the field for each of them is to be conceived. Here, I am interested in drawing on her thinking about space and time because she conceptualises the relationship between the two rather differently, and to different ends, than literary theorists such as Fish or Bakhtin whose purposes are predominantly textual, or spatial theorists such as Soja seeking to redress imbalances against the temporal. Applying her ideas to the reading process, I will argue, offers fresh perspectives and hence potentially new ways of describing readers and readership.

The key work I discuss is *For space* (Massey, 2005). In it, Massey moves through a sequence of arguments about how and why we need to reconceptualise space in relation to, rather than separately from, time. In brief, she argues that traditionally space has been thought of 'as a surface' (*ibid.*, p. 4) but that is problematic. As an example, she uses Hernan Cortes's voyage of discovery and conquest of the Aztecs to suggest that we tend to view such an enterprise as involving people

travelling across space and acquiring new territory, with space represented as a surface to be covered. The emphasis is thus on the trajectories of the European explorers not the Aztecs; the trajectories of the Aztecs and how they have come to be where they are, are absent from the picture. If however, we reconceptualise conquest as encounter, as a 'meeting-up of histories' (*ibid.*), space acquires another facet: time. Here, and wherever else there has been a tendency to view history or development as a single queue, with some further advanced along it than others, Massey now argues for a complete mind-shift, one in which space is seen as being formed by a multiplicity of trajectories. Those trajectories are arranged not chronologically but contemporaneously, having different origins and possibly different futures but, for the present moment, coexisting. Space is the sphere created by the interrelations and interactions of these trajectories. It is 'predicated upon the existence of plurality' (*ibid.*, p. 9). Above all:

... it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far (*ibid.*).

One sociopolitical outcome of this redescription of space is the need to move away from the tendency to essentialise people along class, gender or geopolitical lines. Space becomes dynamic not static, its momentum derived from innumerable trajectories, constantly in formation. Space cannot therefore be seen as an enclosure into which people may be corralled. On the contrary, it is a process of negotiation which arises from the encounters between differing trajectories always in transformation:

... the concomitant fractures, ruptures and structural divides, are what makes it in the end so unamenable to a single totalising project (*ibid.*, p. 100).

Despite the usually benevolent intentions of those who conduct large-scale research into young people's reading habits, their work often comes to be used in support of 'totalising projects'. In due course, before discussing how and why my own study aimed to focus instead on readers' plurality and distinctiveness, I will refer to some examples of such research, arguing that not only does its scale obscure the local detail which defines individual readers' trajectories, but also that the methodology tends to be reiterative, ending each time at much the same point

as previous work. First, however, I consider how situating the research historically as well as spatially also helps to make the move away from that position.

Reading historically

Historians of education are understandably sensitive to the nature and availability of their source material. Philip Gardner, in his detailed study *The lost elementary schools of Victorian England: The people's education* (Gardner, 1984), laments the scarcity of documentary evidence which survives to record the experience of education from the perspective of those for whose benefit it was promoted. He points out that such documents as do still exist are usually 'the products of the educational "expert", and carry all the preconceived prejudices and value judgments of that kind. They exhibit a particular and uniform cultural construction of the notion of "school", of learning, of teaching – of education' (*ibid.*, p. 52). Bringing his scholarly forensic skills to bear on such evidence as has survived, Gardner succeeds in painting a subtly different picture of educational provision available to the working classes in nineteenth century England, arguing that from their perspective the much-maligned dame schools might have been more highly valued than evidence left by representatives of the church or state allows.

In the light of this point, it is interesting to read Lawrence Stenhouse's argument that case studies and what he terms case study records should form the basis for a contemporary history of education (Stenhouse, 1978). He suggests that empirical research should result in the creation of sources which, cumulatively, will form the basis for subsequent generalisation shored up by experience over time. Had such case studies been available to Gardner, the nature and scope of his research could have been very different. There is another way in which Stenhouse's ideas are pertinent to Gardner's and that is in the stance adopted by researchers towards their subject-matter. In opposition to research which collects data about educational behaviour and essentially reports the observer's rather than the observed's viewpoint, Stenhouse argues for fieldwork which seeks access to the thoughts, feelings and experiences of the actors themselves. These ideas have informed several decades of empirical research, notably in Stenhouse's chief area of interest which is action research conducted by classroom teachers. Interestingly, his views are not unconnected with those of another group of

historians – historians of reading – for whom documentary evidence and the perspectives of readers themselves are of crucial significance.

One such historian is Jonathan Rose who argues the need for the kind of research both Gardner and Stenhouse would advocate in order to understand more about how ordinary readers read in nineteenth century Britain (Rose, 2001; 2007). Rather than falling into the trap of thinking that readers' responses can be deduced entirely from evidence such as library lending or book marketing records (Rose, 1995), he turns to what readers actually wrote. He acknowledges his considerable debt both to Richard Altick's detailed history of mass public reading in the nineteenth century, *The English common reader* (Altick, 1957), and David Vincent's scholarly work on nineteenth century autodidacts, *Bread, knowledge and freedom: A study of nineteenth century working class autobiography* (Vincent, 1981). Whilst he is mindful of potential bias inherent in the accounts of working class men and women motivated enough to write their autobiographies, he argues that they are nevertheless individuals who read and whose testimonies therefore count. For contemporary researchers of reading such as myself, the work of historians like Altick, Vincent and Rose offers invaluable evidence of the trajectories of individual readers in the past as well as the broader historical development of reading as a pastime.

Altick's work, like a social realist painting by William Powell Frith or Ford Madox Brown (a panoramic sweep constructed of manifold small details), is vast in its scope whilst also attending to the detail of common readers, 'nameless but exceedingly numerous', (Altick, 1957, p. 12) within the religious, social, political and educational contexts of their times and those that preceded them. He (like Gardner) laments that his democratic impulses are thwarted because sources subsequently recovered were for the most part not available to him at that time:

With few exceptions, the only humbly born members of the nineteenth-century reading public who left behind some narrative of their experience of books were those most unusual men who finally achieved prominence as politicians or in some other capacity (*ibid.*, p. 244).

Nevertheless, he continues:

The autobiographies written by this little group of self-taught men are far more illuminating than pages of statistics and generalizations. They tell us where individual youths managed to find their books, what they read, and under what circumstances (*ibid.*).

Rose is able to develop those insights further, drawing on sources which he does have at his disposal: autobiographical accounts of ordinary people including textile workers, colliers, stonemasons, farm workers, servants, carpenters, mill workers and school teachers. He argues that reader-response theory, which pays due attention to both text *and* reader, is an essential tool if we are to recover a sense of *how* those readers read, rather than just *what*. Such reading histories offer not only methodological pointers as to how new research might be conducted and evidence gathered, but also ongoing interconnected studies of both social and individual reading patterns in the light of which the continuities or disjunctions with new data can be considered. What, for example, might result if a young person's reading is considered historically not just in the immediate present, and if her or his parents' reading histories are brought to bear as well? What new angles might historical as well as contemporary social, cultural and spatial perspectives on reading permit as regards, for example, reading and gender or reading and socioeconomic disadvantage?

What the above-mentioned historians appear to have in common with Massey is commitment to a democratic principle that their subjects' distinctiveness be considered. Rose argues that this is crucial since evidence collected by historians of reading shows readers read variously and independently, not predictably (Rose, 2007). Broad categorisations, for example by class or gender, are often keystones of purely theoretical research but, says Rose, they offer weaker predictive information about reading preferences than empirical data. Indeed, as he argued in a conference keynote address in 2008, 'variousness is significant; idiosyncrasy constitutes a pattern' (Rose, 2008). In order to discover the extent to which broad categorisations might, indeed, limit rather than deepen understanding about young people's reading, I now turn my attention to some examples of reading surveys to discuss their limitations and hence my decision to use other methods in the design of my own research.

The limitations of surveys

Within the United Kingdom (UK), three major studies in the twentieth century (Jenkinson, 1940; Whitehead *et al.*, 1977; Hall and Coles, 1999) seem to have established a national pattern. Key aims were to discover trends in what young people read as well as how much and how often. After the first study, by Jenkinson, the motivation was also in part to discover whether and how reading patterns had changed over time. There were underlying concerns about the quality of young people's reading material and the fact that boys seemed to read less than girls. The rationale and scope of the studies appear to have determined a characteristic methodology, essentially more quantitative than qualitative, although two of the three do involve some follow-up interviews with a small proportion of their sample. All three, therefore, with their combination of statistical tables and author discussion, offer a wide-angle view of young people's reading at three points in the century. The view is quite heartening since there seems to be no observable decline in reading, contrary to what is popularly claimed. However, the reports all conclude with calls for both teaching and research to attend in much finer detail to individual readers and their reading habits. Jenkinson urges that 'Teachers should make their own inquiries about reading habits amongst the children they teach' (Jenkinson, 1940, p. 156) since his sample is not representative and his findings cannot therefore be readily applied to other contexts. Whitehead *et al.* likewise acknowledge that the team's use of a survey with follow-up interviews does not allow them to 'draw any firm conclusions about the causes which produce changes in reading patterns from one age to another' (Whitehead *et al.*, 1977, p. 292) and they suggest the need for a longitudinal study of a much smaller sample which 'would be of great practical value to both teachers and children's librarians' (*ibid.*). Hall and Coles meanwhile argue that teachers should 'keep careful records of what children enjoy reading, ... make use of those records in discussion with the child and ... encourage interest, enthusiasm and a sense of purpose in reading, rather than focusing on numbers of books read' (Hall and Coles, 1999, pp. 139-140). These three large and influential studies, then, all end with advice to teachers and researchers which suggests the need for closer, more finely-attuned attention to individuals. Interestingly, though, none of them suggests that the young readers themselves might participate more fully in different kinds of research, something which my

own study is expressly designed to encourage in order to see whether it leads not merely to different aspects of knowledge about reading, but also to understanding.

A study which does pay closer attention to its participants is Elizabeth Moje's research in the United States (US) (Moje *et al.*, 2008). It constructs adolescents' literacy as diverse and multi-faceted, their reading firmly embedded in social practices leading to complex relationships between reading and literacy achievement measured in academic terms. The project focuses on over a thousand young people aged between eleven and fourteen, involves a very large team of researchers but uses mixed methods to collect data, for example computer surveys, reading diagnostics, school record data, semi-structured interviews, reading and writing process interviews, ethnographic interviews and observations. Whilst as broad in its scope as the three UK surveys, it is much more detailed in its design. Early findings led the team to conclude that 'a stronger research base is needed to understand the relationship between what, why, and how youth read and write on their own and in school' (*ibid.*, p. 24) and that researchers should 'continue to examine how educational practice and policy can draw from and support – without co-opting, exploiting, or diminishing – the powerful literacy practices of young people's everyday lives' (*ibid.*, p. 26).

International studies such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) *Reading for change: Performance and engagement across countries* (Kirsch *et al.*, 2002) conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), or the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Twist *et al.*, 2003; Twist, Schagan and Hodgson, 2007) undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) almost inevitably present findings with broad brush strokes, using data drawn from reading literacy tests. PISA tests students aged fifteen, whilst PIRLS studies nine- to ten-year-olds. Neither, then, focuses on the age group in which I am interested, though clearly their findings have the potential to influence thinking about twelve- to thirteen-year-olds, attracting as they do considerable media coverage on publication due to the opportunity they appear to offer for drawing international comparisons. Of the two, *Reading for change: performance and engagement across countries* (Kirsch *et al.*, 2002) has most relevance to my study, since the focus is a view of reading literacy as essential for young people to act in, and

engage with, the world which they inhabit. Furthermore, one of its unique features is its emphasis on 'the concept of engagement in reading' (*ibid.*, p. 22), especially as it relates to socioeconomic background and gender. Two key findings about reading engagement are interesting. The first is arrived at by analysing reading scores in the light of parents' occupational status and engagement in reading, engagement being measured 'on the basis of students' responses to questions covering time spent on reading, interest in and attitude towards reading, and diversity and content of reading' (*ibid.*, p. 107). Their finding is that:

Fifteen-year-olds whose parents have the lowest occupational status but who are highly engaged in reading achieve better reading scores than students whose parents have high or medium occupational status but who are poorly engaged in reading (*ibid.*, p. 106).

However, the questionnaire did not seek to establish any more substantial detail about the participants' family backgrounds, so whilst the finding may be valuable at the level of policy it is of limited use to those seeking to develop engagement itself in practice.

The second offers a rebuttal to those who essentialise gender difference in reading:

Males in some countries are more engaged in reading than females in other countries (*ibid.*, p. 119).

Although the same point about gender difference can be drawn from any of the surveys so far mentioned within the UK itself, namely that some males are more engaged in reading than some females, the argument for taking an international perspective complements a related point about the ability to gain a historical view of patterning and how a broader angle enables us to conceptualise reading practices differently. However, the report has been criticised by educational statistician, Harvey Goldstein, for its 'narrowness of focus' (Goldstein, 2004, p. 328) and several reasons have been offered as to why its findings should be viewed with caution, especially any attempts to draw international comparisons between apparent levels of achievement. For my purposes, Goldstein's final comments in his critique of the report are crucial. Arguing the need for a different approach such as a longitudinal study, he suggests:

... any such survey should be viewed primarily not as a vehicle for ranking countries, even along many dimensions, but rather as a way of exploring country differences in terms of cultures, curricula and school organization. To do this requires a different approach to the design of questionnaires and test items with a view to exposing diversity rather than attempting to exclude the 'untypical' (*ibid.*, p. 329).

My own research, by focusing specifically on individuals, will take a different approach again primarily in order to explore the diversity and idiosyncrasy which surveys seem destined to overlook as a result of their organisational structures.

An analysis of other recent small-scale research projects focusing on adolescent reading shows there is little inclination to vary the methodology although explicit awareness of the need to do so is evident in the context of researching digital, media and on-screen reading (Alvermann and Reinking, 2003; Mackey, 2003; Burke and Rowsell, 2008). Most researchers use questionnaires (Benton, 1995; Manuel and Robinson, 2003; Strommen and Fowles Mates, 2004; Clark and Foster, 2005; Hopper, 2005; Maynard *et al.*, 2007; Hammett and Sanford, 2008). All these projects are conducted within educational contexts and their conclusions therefore steer towards implications for teachers rather than for students. Furthermore, all seem to argue that data are still needed which lead to greater understanding: Clark and Foster suggest teachers 'consult with students to learn of their interests and to ensure that the range of reading materials available in school reflects those interests' (Clark and Foster, 2005, p. 103). Hopper meanwhile asks simply 'what do we want of adolescent readers?' (Hopper, 2005, p. 119). Manuel and Robinson state the now self-evident point that there is 'ongoing need for teachers of English at secondary level to plan and implement a reading programme that caters for the diverse needs, interests, tastes, and capacities of individuals within their class, acknowledging at all times the powerful role of student choice and enjoyment in teenagers' reading achievement' (Manuel and Robinson, 2003, p. 76).

Only occasionally do researchers diverge from this kind approach, for example Eileen Carnell (2005) who uses semi-structured interviews and draws on 'appreciative inquiry' (Hammond, 1998) in her evaluation of the use of *Full On* magazine as an intervention strategy to promote boys' engagement in reading. Appreciative inquiry is an approach to analysing what works within an

organisation, as distinct from focusing on problems, as a starting point for change. Carnell finds some aspects of the recommended process helpful within the context of educational interviewing, namely appreciating and valuing what is already assumed to be working well and engaging in dialogue to generate new thinking. She argues that in her study '[t]he interview itself contributed to the development of a richer discourse about reading ... Asking questions is influential' (Carnell, 2005, p. 384), a point later corroborated in a National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) report on the strengths and limitations of appreciative inquiry in educational research (Shuayb *et al.*, 2009). Carnell attributes this apparent success to theoretical perspectives informing appreciative inquiry which view knowledge as socially constructed and hence amenable to discussion, a stance I have adopted in my own previous interviews with readers (Cliff Hodges, 2009) and which I discuss further below. She therefore makes a slightly different recommendation to the other researchers listed above, namely that we should 'encourage young people to engage in research into reading backgrounds of young people' (Carnell, 2005, p. 387). Her suggestion is not at odds with my research methods within this project which likewise position young people to play a more active and purposeful role in the investigation.

The potential of case studies

Having outlined some reservations about the survey approach to researching reading, I now turn to research which has been more influential in shaping my thinking, in particular a variety of case studies. Case studies of readers in their teenage years are relatively rare, perhaps because of the intricacies involved, substantively as well as methodologically. Susan Hynds's longitudinal study of teenage readers in an urban classroom in the US, published as *On the brink: Negotiating literature and life with adolescents* (Hynds, 1997), took three years to complete. It began as what Hynds terms a conventional *psychological* constructivist study using questionnaires and interviews, becoming what she terms a *social* constructivist study as she realised the limitations of focusing on the reader alone and moved 'into a broader interest in how readers, in interaction with others, develop identities as readers and literate persons' (*ibid.*, p. 10). Margaret Mackey's fascinating study of young people in Canada, *Literacies across media: Playing the text* (Mackey, 2007), focuses on their engagement with texts using a range of technologies. However, some of the technologies were outmoded by the

time of the second edition five years later, further complicating her findings. More recently, in their research in the US entitled "*Reading don't fix no Chevys*": *Literacy in the lives of young men* (Smith and Wilhelm, 2002) which explores a group of boys and their reading from sociocultural perspectives, the authors argue that:

Instead of identifying their achievements and needs through statistical averages in which their differences are lost, we need to recognize and work with individual difference, variety, and plurality and make that diversity a strength of our classroom (*ibid.*, p. 184).

A number of researchers in the UK clearly recognised a similar need in the 1980s leading to a series of interesting case studies with young teenagers which, as a practising classroom English teacher, I read when they were first published (Meek, 1983; Fry, 1985; Sarland, 1991). They offer particular ways of looking at reading in schools in the decade just before the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1989. The intention of these studies can perhaps best be characterised (to draw an analogy with the study of grammar) as *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive* since their contribution to understanding derives from accounts of teachers engaging in their own research, taking a critically reflective, analytical, view of what readers do and how reading is taught. These works not only informed my thinking as a teacher but have also affected the design of this study, not for nostalgic reasons, but because their emphasis is learning and development, diversity and idiosyncrasy (for teachers as well as students) rather than conformity to centrally-specified goals for performance and achievement.

Achieving literacy: Longitudinal studies of adolescents learning to read (Meek, 1983) was a collaboration between Margaret Meek, then working at the University of London Institute of Education, and four colleagues one of whom was also at the Institute, the others working in London comprehensive schools as teachers with a particular interest in children with special educational needs. Their account of the project begins with a lament that 'too much is written about what teachers *ought* to do, and how children *should* behave in reading lessons. The evidence of what actually happens is very scarce' (*ibid.*, p. 3). What then follows is a somewhat rough-edged synthesis of transcripts of discussions, lessons, conversations with students, reflections in a variety of forms, woven into a narrative of sorts but one in which close-up portraits of individual young people,

still struggling to become readers in the early years of their secondary schooling, are brought into sharp relief through their own as well as the writers' words. The researchers discuss what they perceive to be the ideological basis of their work. In particular, it is motivated by powerful liberal humanist beliefs about the qualities and values of certain kinds of literary texts (predominantly narrative fiction) which, albeit for good reasons, are largely the texts with which they encourage the young people to read. Their intentions are humane, strongly influenced by Kenneth Goodman's psycholinguistic approach to the teaching of reading (Goodman and Gollasch, 1982) which urged the need to work in a holistic way, helping readers who did not learn it automatically to understand that reading is not merely about decoding but about making print meaningful. Like Ronald Morris before them (Morris, 1973), and expressly heartened by his work, they are concerned with what constitutes success in learning to read, but concomitantly, critically aware of how failure may also be learnt in the institutional practices which young people encounter in school.

Another study featuring detailed accounts of a very small handful of readers is Donald Fry's *Children talk about books: Seeing themselves as readers* (Fry, 1985). The work derives from research undertaken as part of an in-service training course whilst the author was Head of English in an inner-city comprehensive school. The participants in his study come from three local schools, one primary and two secondary (neither of which was his own). He deliberately chose to work with children of different ages (in this case eight, twelve and fifteen) in order to include a sense of how reading and readers change and develop over time, something otherwise difficult to achieve other than by conducting longitudinal studies. Fry draws on a variety of data including a small amount of written work completed in lessons, but his chief source is the individual conversations he had with each child over a period of several months. He reports in depth on these conversations, quoting frequently from his transcripts and analysing their possible import. Of particular interest to me is his emphasis on the value of conversation (as distinct from interview or questionnaire). Although the conversations include persistent questioning, the questions are not premeditated but arise from the discussions and the activities which punctuate them (e.g. looking together at a pile of books; reading a wordless picturebook). Whilst apologetic about what he thinks some might perceive as the limitations of the transcripts, Fry is insistent on one

key point: 'the young readers in this study all make valuable statements about reading which I feel would not have been said in any other context but conversation' (*ibid.*, p. 2). He might have been even more specific and said 'these conversations' since it is clear Fry has particular theoretical perspectives which tend him towards speculation with strong psychological leanings and a keen interest in the affordances of the then currently popular reader-response theories which had begun to permeate classroom teaching, especially via the kind of in-service courses that he was undertaking at the time. His reflection on and questioning of what happens when the children read lead to a rich layering of detail which research on a bigger scale would not be able to emulate. Furthermore, Fry believes that in the process of talking about reading, the children 'grow into an awareness of themselves reading which is another way of coming to understand how they learn, how they live, how they are' (*ibid.*, p. 107). His insight prefigures later studies such as Courtney Cazden's influential *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning* (Cazden, 2001) in which close analysis of many different kinds of classroom talk shows the subtly distinct opportunities for learning afforded by talk with other people: teachers, peers or familiar adults. As I have realised from my own interviews with young people about reading, talking with a hitherto unknown adult demands of young people like those in Fry's study a habit of explicitness which is different from what is required when they are discussing reading with people who know them well and do not need shared prior knowledge to be spelled out. The argument for discussion – whether conversation or interview – as a form of research is a powerful one if the process of talking as well as the nature of the talk lead to greater self-awareness of oneself as a reader.

Fry's study as a whole offers fascinating insights, dwelling at length as it does on Clayton's readings of Richard Adams' *Watership Down*, Karnail's establishing himself as a reader courtesy of Enid Blyton's Secret Seven series and Joanne juxtaposing James Herbert's *The Rats* with her interest in Beatrix Potter books and artefacts. Each reader's experience is completely different to the next; their relationships with other family members as readers are equally varied. But that is Fry's purpose in deciding to research in this way: 'The value of case-study is not that it allows us to establish a type, but that it provides us with a reference point in helping us to characterise other individuals' (Fry, 1985, p. 4). Fry regrets missing

the opportunity to talk with any members of the children's families, though he does glean valuable support for his work from talking with the children's teachers. If parents know and relate to their children as readers then it seems highly likely they will potentially have a unique perspective to offer. Such perspectives are ones I therefore incorporated into my own research.

Charles Sarland's study a few years later, *Young people reading: Culture and response* (Sarland, 1991) makes explicit his indebtedness to both Fry and Meek. Like them, he is interested in the specificity of young people's reading as a way to reflect on the broader sweep of our understandings, not the other way round. However, his work emphasises different aspects of young people's reading lives: as his sub-title might suggest, the culture of reading in which their reading takes place is of paramount importance, as are the reading autobiographies inscribed in their articulated responses in his research. Sarland's work, like Fry's, is especially influenced by the literary theory debates prevalent at the time (Eagleton, 1983) and arises out of doctoral research he was undertaking. A former middle school teacher, he elected to conduct his research within a local secondary school but is less sanguine than Fry about the benefits this enables. He regrets, for example, not being a class teacher within the school when conducting one of his initial surveys: 'In retrospect the survey was useful only to the person who did it, giving me a feel for the current situation. It seems to me that such is almost always the case. By far the most useful surveys are those done by teachers in their own classes. That way you can pick up on fascinating local enthusiasms' (Sarland, 1991, p. 29). However, since his overarching interest lies more in the interconnections between cultural elements such as ideology or gender and reading response, it is arguable that working at one remove stands him in better stead. Taking issue with the legacy of the Leavisite tradition in most school English departments, Sarland's mission is to represent young people's reading by analysing their responses to a range of popular cultural texts such as James Herbert's novel, *The Fog*, or one of David Morrell's Rambo novels, *First Blood*. His method is to identify critical positions recognisable from the world of literary theory in young readers themselves, something he does successfully. If, he writes, 'the text has the requisite plurality then it is open to alternative readings by boys and girls. If, on the other hand, texts, or parts of texts seem to be ideologically *closed*, then it seems to be possible to read *against* the closure, as I argue the girls did with parts

of *First Blood* and *The Fog*' (*ibid.*, p. 62). Whilst his proof of resistant and critical readings of popular fiction by these young people is refreshing, there is a sense in which he is less open-minded as a researcher than Fry, for example in his tendency to essentialise girls and boys as readers and in his classification of certain kinds of literature, admirable though his inclusion of it is. Looking back at Fry's work in which James Herbert and Beatrix Potter become companions in one girl's reading world, we see Fry responding with interest and speculation; in Sarland's work, popular and classic fiction or boys' and girls' reading tend to be represented as oppositional.

Reading Meek, Fry and Sarland alongside one another is one of the few chances we have to test out Stenhouse's argument about the cumulative effect of case studies and whether, as Fry posits, 'their value will increase as they join, and are joined by, other similar studies of individual readers' (Fry, 1985, p. 1). Fry's choice of words chimes with Massey's argument that we acknowledge 'the simultaneous coexistence of other histories with characteristics that are distinct (which does not imply unconnected) and futures which may potentially be so too' (Massey, 2005, p. 11). Whilst I am not certain whether the value of studies such as these increases as they accumulate, to my mind the historical perspective they jointly afford is of considerable interest and importance.

Juxtaposing the literature

In this chapter I have brought together different strands of literature to discuss critically how diverse theoretical positions inform this study as a whole and to consider the possible effects of their juxtaposition. Rosenblatt's theory of the transactional process of reading and Iser's arguments for aesthetic reader-response jostle with Scholes's manifesto for textual power. Bruner's sociocultural theories of education encounter concepts of space-time proposed by Bakhtin and Massey, in particular Massey's imaginative re-orientation of space not as a surface but as a 'meeting up of histories' (*ibid.*, p. 4). To complement her thinking, the work of a number of historians of reading, Rose in particular, is also invoked to argue the case for a strong historical dimension to the study which, along with the spatial, shapes both the substantive and methodological elements of the research. The limitations of survey-style approaches are reviewed alongside the greater potential of case studies for the kind of multilayered and multifaceted reading research I

planned. In the next chapter, I develop these ideas into an argument for a sufficiently intricate methodology to match the complexity of the young people's reading I studied.

3 TOWARDS A RATIONALE FOR THE METHODOLOGY

Planning the scope and nature of the research

In Chapter 1, I listed my research questions, divided into two types: firstly, there were substantive questions to address why and how a group of habitual, committed readers read, how they construed the material they read and what social interactions and cultural values shaped their readership; secondly, there were more methodologically-oriented questions to consider how interpreting the data from spatial perspectives affects the construction of readers, reading and readership, and how also taking a historical perspective sheds further light on contemporary young readers and their reading. In Chapter 2, I offered a critical discussion of literature which informed the study overall. I now present my argument for the methodology, or overarching strategy, I adopted. In Chapter 4, I will outline the four specific research methods I used in order to address my research questions: critical incident collages; semi-structured small-group interviews; students' semi-structured interviews with a parent or grandparent; individual reading journals.

As I have already argued, the research was conceived of as both multilayered and multifaceted and therefore required a suitably versatile methodology. Furthermore, it needed to be small-scale both to accommodate its complexity and retain its particularity. However, three additional factors were also important: that it was a piece of *educational research*, that it had its roots in the *teaching of English* and, most importantly, that it focused on a highly contested practice namely *reading*. I next explain why these three points were decisive and how they also informed the methodology.

In what ways was the study conceived of as educational research?

The research had a strong educational motive, one which affected not only the context of the study but also the design of the research methods and the development of the thesis. Richard Pring draws a distinction between 'research which is firmly embedded within the social sciences and which may well be relevant to education, and research which arises from distinctively educational concerns and which draws upon, but is not to be reduced to, the knowledge which has accumulated within those sciences' (Pring, 2004, p. 9). My research falls into

the latter category. As I have already said, I work within an educational context as a teacher educator and researcher. Initial teacher education involves the tutor in two interwoven strands of pedagogical thinking, one appropriate to beginner teachers embarking on their career, the other to teachers and students in school classrooms. In order for my research to be of educational note, my intention with this project was to undertake work which would inform pedagogy in both contexts on the basis that understandings which make a difference to teachers and students in school are also of interest to those in initial teacher education as well as more experienced students of education, advisors and policy-makers. Implicit in that intention is the complex issue of values – especially as they are debated within the relationship between reading, teaching and education – which I address and justify later in the thesis, taking up a position against arguments for ‘value neutrality’ such as have been proposed by Martyn Hammersley (1999).

What educational principles underpin the study?

Having spent my entire life within the education system – as student, undergraduate, postgraduate, trainee, teacher and teacher educator – it is interesting to try to account for how I come to hold the general educational principles I do, principles which inform my own pedagogy and hence this research. Chief amongst those principles is one constructed from first-hand experience, later affirmed by empirical and theoretical evidence and especially pertinent within school classrooms, namely that the relationship between teacher and learner must be reciprocal and intersubjective – transactional rather than transmissive – in order that conditions are ripe for meaning-making and the development of understanding. Looking to see whether and how my interest in these kinds of pedagogic principles might have arisen from any of my own experiences of schooling, I realise that it may stem from my primary school. The school as a whole had a distinctive ethos arising from its membership of the Parents National Education Union (PNEU), although there were (I seem to remember) variations in how the ethos was adhered to by individual class teachers. I was aware that the school belonged to the PNEU from a small brass plaque on the wall by the front entrance, but I do not remember understanding what that really meant. I have subsequently come to recognise how PNEU principles informed the school’s curriculum and pedagogy, however. There was a strong emphasis on the arts, especially music, literature and art appreciation.

Unlike other influential approaches such as those developed by Froebel, a key idea behind PNEU teaching is that children are *persons* (rather than merely children) and capable of learning through high quality material, not necessarily devised specially for young people. For example *picture study* is a curriculum area which specifies weekly close study of a famous painting, focusing on the work of a different well-known artist each term.

Having recently read more about the principles of PNEU schooling it seems that some aspects of the overall approach may have put down roots somewhere within my own thinking about education. Charlotte Mason, an architect of the late nineteenth-century home education movement, was a founder member of the PNEU. She articulated a highly distinctive set of educational principles, originally in response to middle class parents' anxiety about the poor quality of education and training of the governesses they employed. Later, her writings and lectures (as well as her very specific Christian beliefs) were also used to underpin the PNEU movement (Mason, 1925/1934). As I have already indicated, it is therefore possible to identify several ideas adopted by my primary school. However, more interesting still are my memories of the effects of these approaches, especially the sense of feeling respected as a learner, and then to read that one of Mason's strongest arguments is that children should be treated as *persons* and should be accorded due respect. Children learn, she argues, by taking responsibility for their developing knowledge, making connections between what is new to them and what they already know, because something 'only becomes knowledge to a person which he has assimilated, which his mind has acted upon' (*ibid.*, p. 12). She believes strongly in children's capacity to learn if their experiences of learning are direct and active. Her respect for all children's potential achievement is evident, for example, in her advocacy of what she calls *living books*, books written by someone with a passion for the subject, in a conversational narrative style so that – above all else – children will engage with them. Indeed, she herself wrote a series about geography in the 1880s – the Ambleside Geography Books – enacting a point made by Dewey (quoting Emerson) that respect for the child 'involves at once, immense claims on the time, the thought, on the life of the teacher' (Dewey, 1916, p. 51). However, engagement alone is not sufficient for learning to become fully embedded; as a teacher, Mason believes that other faculties need to be in play and, therefore, taught. Reading, for example, is not merely a matter of private

engagement; learning is brought about through subsequently re-telling what has been read, not by rote, but through narration which, she argues, involves synthesis, selection and organisation. Crucially, it is brought about because re-telling a story to another interested person is a form of communication. Although distinctive, in many respects Mason's ideas develop from a long tradition of child-centred educational thinking, as well as anticipating many still to come in the twentieth century (Doddington and Hilton, 2007). Interesting to me in particular is her stress on children acquiring a habit of attentiveness, for example by means of picture study sessions referred to earlier or expecting to listen to a story only once before being able to narrate it independently. She argues that reading is best learnt as a direct experience which, if a child is attentive, does not require teacher interference. It should be stressed that she believes this to be the case for all children, not merely the middle-class or privileged, unless they have some form of specific learning difficulty.

Educationally, Mason's methods appear to have survived explicitly within the home education movement rather than mainstream schooling, but I am interested in connections between her representation of children as capable people compared with how they are now often portrayed in educational contexts in the UK. Recent policy and practice have essentialised and then pathologised swathes of young people – for being girls or boys; for displaying antisocial behaviour; for conforming to social class or ethnic stereotyping. Then they have been offered a way forward through what is often termed *empowerment* – a word which, ironically, represents these young people as recipients rather than agents of power – conferring on them the right to think, speak, offer an opinion. Such perceptions would be anathema to Mason whose philosophy rests on the notion that from the outset children have the power to play a full and active role in their learning. Education based on expectations that young people can and should exercise agency necessarily suggests research based on equivalent methodology. This argument not only explains my view of the limitations of survey-style methods of research but also provides a justification for the nature of my own research and the desire to learn more about the distinctiveness of individual young readers.

The project I envisaged, however, precisely because it was initiated from within an educational context, also took its shape from what I consider to be advantages

and benefits of learning specifically within school contexts. Although not all the research activities were completed within school, they were structured to be distinctly collaborative and interactive in character. To return to Bruner's tenets for a cultural approach to education (Bruner, 1996), already referred to in Chapter 2, the advantages and benefits of undertaking these kinds of activities within a school or family context include: being in a situation where contending perspectives might be expected and debated and reflection on ideas encouraged; intersubjectivity being of the essence because classrooms are peopled with many different individuals; the process of implicit knowledge being made explicit, presented for scrutiny and critically appraised. The research process I adopted acknowledged these attributes, not as unproblematic, but as nevertheless offering the potential for constructing readers, reading and readership in different ways. As I have already discussed in relation to Fry's work, the assumption was that young people would be able to articulate ideas about their reading within and beyond school and that the research methods adopted would encourage them to externalise what they knew implicitly, not just for the benefit of research but in ways that might also result in *them* furthering their own learning. The design of the project was not premised on notions of enabling *pupil voice*, nor on student consultation in the service of school improvement (McIntyre, Peddar and Rudduck, 2005); on the contrary, in keeping with longstanding traditions in English teaching (Barnes *et al.*, 1971), it assumed not only that they already had a voice but that they had things to say from which there was, intrinsically, much for others to learn. It did not therefore envisage them as co-researchers, even though they were central to the research process. It did, however, view their position as fully active participants in the process.

What views of learning shape the research?

The decision to undertake research with young people who were habitual and committed readers stemmed from a sense that if we are to learn about young people's reading we need to understand at least as much about what they can do as about the pitfalls and difficulties they encounter. However, in keeping not only with the pedagogical principles outlined above but also with the ethic of respect reiterated in the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines on research, I was concerned that the project would generate 'improvement in practice and enhancement of knowledge' (British Educational Research

Association, 2004, p. 13). I was therefore mindful that not only the research but the teaching and learning on which it depended required activity which engaged the students, was based on authentic reading and stimulated purposeful, worthwhile discussion. Robin Alexander's definition of pedagogy as 'the act of teaching together with the ideas, values and beliefs by which that act is informed, sustained and justified' (Alexander, 2008a, p. 4) informed my thinking because it includes not only the curricular domain but also the domains of culture, self and history (Alexander, 2004). Since my project involved a similar matrix, I recognised issues pertaining to the study of thought and language within the field of psychology, as outlined by Vygotsky in the opening pages of *Thought and language* (Vygotsky, 1986). He argues the need to study their 'interfunctional relations ... their interdependence and their organization in the structure of consciousness as a whole' (*ibid.*, p. 1) and for a shift from analysis of individual *elements* to analysis of a *unit* which is 'further unanalyzable and yet retains the properties of the whole' (*ibid.*, p. 5). As I have already suggested, surveys into reading, helpful though they may be in some respects, often involve what Vygotsky describes as a form of analysis which leaves us with information about discrete elements and hence only the ability to apply that information in the most general of ways. It is a type of analysis, he argues, which:

... may not be called analysis in the proper sense of this word. It is generalization, rather than analysis. The chemical formula for water is equally applicable to the water in a great ocean and the water in a raindrop. That is why by analysing water into its elements we shall get its most general characteristics rather than the individually specific.

This type of analysis provides no adequate basis for the study of the multiform concrete relations between thought and language that arise in the course of development and functioning of verbal thought in its various aspects (*ibid.*, pp. 4-5).

Whilst recognising the impossibility that a study of reading can ever represent adequately all its various aspects, the social constructionist approach I took (which I discuss in more detail later in this chapter) coincides with Vygotsky's aspirations to analyse units rather than atomistic elements. Moreover, there is a potential synergy between his 'multiform concrete relations between thought and language that arise in the course of development and functioning of verbal thought' (*ibid.*) and viewing reading from the perspective of Massey's concept of space as a 'realm of multiple trajectories' (Massey, 2005, p. 89). Following Vygotsky's analogy through, it is interesting to ask what might be the equivalent

of 'word meaning not only as a union of thought and speech, but also as a union of generalization and communication, thought and communication' (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 9). The concept of *readership*, as defined in Chapter 1, seems to offer an approximation and has potential as an aspect of analysis if seen as comprising individuals in action as readers within various sociocultural contexts.

Why choose to work from within rather than outside a school?

As outlined in the opening section of this chapter, three facets were particularly important in shaping the design of the research, namely that it should be *educational research*, rooted in the *teaching of English* and focused on *reading*. The first of these, its conception as educational research, brings me to another reason for drawing on Vygotsky's work in the design of the project. My teaching experience suggested it was likely that the kind of discussions about reading students might expect to have with teachers and peers (and hence with a researcher) in school would be qualitatively different from those they might have with friends and family (and hence with a researcher) outside school. There were two reasons to support this assumption. Firstly, Vygotsky's thinking on the development of scientific as distinct from spontaneous concepts is that they 'evolve under the conditions of systematic cooperation between the child and the teacher ... [and] benefit from the systematicity of instruction and cooperation' (*ibid.*, p. 148). This systematicity made it reasonable to suppose that students would already have been explicitly discussing concepts related to reading as part of their school learning, in other words engaging in what Suzanne Miller terms 'disciplinary thinking' (Miller, 2003, p. 311), and would see the research as continuous with that process or, at least, that the school would be receptive to approaches which encouraged them to do so. Whilst it might be the case that some young readers have similar discussions about reading outside school, school is arguably where all of them can do so, especially in classrooms where teaching and learning is a dialectical process such as that formulated by Vygotsky to characterise the relation of thought to word. He describes this dynamic as:

... not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought. In that process, the relation of thought to word undergoes changes that themselves may be regarded as development in the functional sense. Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 218).

If, as suggested earlier, the research was to focus on processes rather than fixed attributes, then the classroom seemed a likely situation in which to initiate certain activities some of which, however, would be carried out by the students beyond the school. If it also offered the opportunity to note transformations in students' perceptions about reading, 'changes that themselves may be regarded as development in the functional sense' (*ibid.*) that would be of particular interest as well.

A further reason for wishing to work within a school context (as distinct, say, from with a voluntary extra-curricular reading group) and intimately connected to the work of Vygotsky, was one discussed by Luis Moll in the introduction to his edited volume on the application of Vygotskian thinking in educational contexts (Moll, 1990). Writing about the concept of the zone of proximal development, he argues that it:

... embodies or integrates key elements of [Vygotskian] theory: the emphasis on social activity and cultural practice as sources of thinking, the importance of mediation in human psychological functioning, the centrality of pedagogy in development, and the inseparability of the individual from the social. The concept of the zone posits active individuals as the object of study, with all the complexities that such a unit of study implies (*ibid.*, p. 15).

Although zones of proximal development do not require formal educational contexts for their operation, classrooms are vital spaces in which to bring them into force. The best classroom teaching views the learner as active and complex and enables social activity and cultural practice which generates thinking, recognises the role of mediation in human psychological functioning and situates pedagogy at the heart of development. Since the classroom also accommodates not just one but multiple learners, the space is constantly in flux, sometimes systematically so, other times more open-endedly. I therefore expected that if the research was at least initiated within such a context, analysis of the data generated might lead to the kind of rich and complex representation of readers I sought.

Why initiate the research within the context of an English classroom?

A second facet contributing to the shape of the research was its conception as English research, designed to be carried out from within the context of an English

classroom. By *English* I mean (here and throughout) subject English as inscribed within school curricula in England. The rationale for this decision is distinct (though not entirely separate) from the educational reasons I have already outlined. However, in the interests of clarity, I wish to address it discretely at this point in the thesis.

As is implied in the educational rationale offered above, I am interested in pedagogy which Robin Alexander characterises as dialogic, ‘a pedagogy in which dialogue is central: between self and others, between personal and collective knowledge, between present and past, between different ways of making sense’ (Alexander, 2010, p. 199). Dialogic teaching, he writes, (echoing both Dewey and Mason’s recognition of its tough implications for the teacher) ‘challenges not only children’s understanding but also our own. It demands that we have a secure conceptual map of a lesson’s subject-matter, and that we give children greater freedom to explore the territory which that map covers’ (Alexander, 2008b, p. 31). His argument not only assumes interaction between teacher and learner to the benefit of students; in addition, it acknowledges the potential for the interplay to enhance teachers’ own understanding. Alexander’s claims rest on his extensive research in national and international primary schools, informed by several key theorists on whose work I have already drawn (Bakhtin, Bruner and Vygotsky in particular), so they chime readily with the practice of certain forms of secondary English teaching in which my research is rooted. Two in particular are relevant here.

The first involves teaching based on ideas generated in the classroom by learners as well as the teacher. In the context of reading, it may lead, for example, to a rich variety of independent reading and to practices such as genuine discussion about students’ book choices or use of reading journals in which they articulate their developing thoughts about their chosen texts and teachers ask authentic questions in response (Nystrand, 2006).

The second, corresponding form of teaching is based on the understanding that young people’s own prior knowledge and experience form an essential part of their learning (Moje *et al.*, 2008), whether in the transactional process of reading or their own production of texts. The concept here is that teachers who encourage

students to exploit their *funds of knowledge* (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti, 2005) create a sense of coherence which, if lost or ignored, may cause unhelpful rifts between home and school experiences and disrupt the progress of students' learning. In the context of English, some approaches to teaching and learning have placed more emphasis on creating coherent connections between home and school learning than others, though such approaches do not necessarily align themselves neatly with many of the models of teaching with which English pedagogy is commonly identified (Cox, 1991; Marshall, 2000). Rather, they appear to stem from English teachers' deeply embedded cultural values which affect the esteem in which students' learning beyond the classroom is held, especially – in the context of reading – ideas about the merits of what young people read. Earlier in this chapter I stated that I wished to take issue with Hammersley's argument for value neutrality in research (Hammersley, 1999). The argument is made in the context of a published debate about different epistemologies and their consequence for research methods. One of the reasons for opposing his stance is the unlikelihood of any English teacher or researcher being, or wanting to be, neutral in relation to whatever reading young people choose to do. On the contrary, recognising, adopting or refuting critical positions lies at the very heart of what English is about. Of course, teachers may often ignore or even be oblivious to the way their own expressed preferences enhance or devalue any reading capital their students have accrued; nevertheless, as the case studies discussed earlier exemplify, all teachers and researchers have their own reading trajectories and, since the aim of this study is to explore what happens in the encounter between different trajectories, a position of value neutrality would be inconsistent. As already outlined in Chapter 1, the argument (following Massey) is that others' trajectories must be duly acknowledged, whether or not the encounter is harmonious or discordant. (It is perhaps worth noting that Massey's *trajectories* subsume Gonzalez *et al*'s *funds of knowledge*, but her choice of metaphor is, I would argue, crucially different from theirs: it implies motion, action and the potential for transformation rather than simply a resource to enable action.)

Although schools often advocate reading across the curriculum, deliberate discussion about texts, of the kind which consciously advances students' understanding about reading and readership, may be relatively rare in secondary

schools. An evaluation of English in primary and secondary schools conducted by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) based on evidence from 242 inspections of English between 2005-8 reported that:

... specific plans to develop students' independent reading were confined to Year 7. Some schools persevered with 'library lessons' where the students read silently. These sessions rarely included time to discuss or promote books and other written material and therefore did not help to develop a reading community within the school (Office for Standards in Education, 2009).

However, as Miller (2003) argues, the relationship between teacher-led discussion and students' development as readers is far more complex than the simplistic causality implied by this Ofsted comment since teachers' own values, attitudes and beliefs form a key part of how such discussions take shape. Nevertheless, the English curriculum, despite the fluctuating fortunes of literature as a strand within it, remains the chief area within which students might expect to learn explicitly about reading. It is still the domain of planned, systematic attention to an extraordinary variety of textual study from a wide range of perspectives. If the most recent version of the English National Curriculum (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2008) is seen as a minimum entitlement, students are likely to encounter a far greater diversity of texts within English lessons than anywhere else in school. Indeed, it is also the only area in which textual study is often intrinsically valued, rather than being simply a means to another end. Therefore, in the context of my own research, I anticipated that students' expectations of English would not be at odds with my desire to discuss reading with them, though what values and expectations they themselves would bring to such discussions could by no means be assumed.

What views of reading shape the research?

A third facet shaping the kind of research I envisaged was the way I conceptualise reading. Building on my earlier discussion of the literature where I outline why spatial and historical perspectives should be brought to bear on reading, together with theories of reader-response and textual studies, I now expand the concept of reading to identify four particular aspects which, taken together, formed the basis on which the research was built. Those four aspects are the *process of reading*, *readership*, *texts* and *readers*.

My first research question concerning why and how habitual, committed readers read, was predicated on the idea of reading as a *process*. Once again following Rosenblatt, I argue that the process of reading is a *transaction* between a reader and a text because 'although we can distinguish between them, no sharp separation between perceiver and perception can be made, since the observer is part of the observation' (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 180). The transaction itself might be termed an *intellectual event*, *intellectual* because it involves activity such as marshalling knowledge, interpreting, reasoning, understanding and an *event* because it is a dynamic happening, not a state of permanency. Furthermore, since it is dynamic, it is susceptible to change or revision. The process of reading also engenders different emotional and aesthetic responses, arising from the physical and mental operations involved. It is therefore inherently unstable and presents interesting research challenges which I address in due course.

Readership, though obviously related to reading, is an entirely different entity. The wording of my third research question, which seeks to learn more about how readership accrues, deliberately leaves open the issue of agency and the extent to which readership is actively shaped by individuals and/or determined by the social activity and cultural affiliations of others. My research into readership therefore required a methodology which would do justice to its complexity.

The third aspect of reading, the concept of *texts*, is also fraught with complexity. In the early stages of the research, especially in the initial activity which aimed to orientate discussion about reading and readership, students were encouraged to consider an open-ended definition of texts. Nevertheless, most of the data related to narrative fiction reading in printed book form with some references to magazines, newspapers and films (especially film tie-ins), but very few mentions of internet use or computer gaming. Explicit invitations by me to reflect on electronic texts seldom resulted in any extended discussion. Instead, most students took a utilitarian attitude to what they read on computer, seeing it as a means to an end – to find out information; to be able to play a game; to communicate with others – not an end or source of reading pleasure in itself. Only one student mentioned having a subscription to a gaming magazine, *GamesMaster*. Thus, the object of a major element of the research – texts – was largely determined by students' preference for narrative, especially fiction but also biography and

autobiography with only occasional forays into discussion of comics and magazines.

Finally, there is the concept of the *reader*. Implicit in all that I have so far written is the idea that I view the reader as an individual. By 'individual' I do not mean isolated or disconnected. On the contrary, as I have already suggested in my review of the literature, I view reading as inherently social and intersubjective. Nevertheless, however socially and collaboratively we enact our reading – parents with children, siblings together, a class with their teacher, friends in a reading group – or however carefully a text is paraphrased or represented, no one can ultimately read a text on another person's behalf. To that extent, the reader must, indeed, act as an individual. As I have already argued, there has been no shortage of reading research which attempts to measure or classify the scope of young people's reading, categorising readers in ways which diminish their distinctive qualities. My research, arising as it did from my English teacher educator's interest in the development of individual readers, had at its heart some of the specific experiences of texts, reading and readership which form their trajectories.

The epistemological roots of the research: social constructionism

My study cannot be situated within philosophical traditions which seek objectivity or expect to discover finite truths. Rather, it lies within the domain of constructionism, in particular what is commonly termed *social constructionism* (Crotty, 2003), a way of thinking which has shaped my pedagogy over the years. Since the first aim of the research was to make an original contribution to current thinking by differently configuring how reading is viewed, I now discuss in more detail how and why I adopt this stance.

In what follows, I draw first on Michael Crotty's analysis of social constructionism. In *The foundations of social research*, Crotty defines constructionism as the view that '*all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context*' (*ibid.*, p. 42 *italics in original*). Constructionism rejects the view that knowledge is discoverable or recoverable from anywhere outside the human individual, arguing rather that knowledge exists

in the interaction *between* human beings. Constructionism suggests that agency is directed towards building knowledge from existing material rather than discovering it or creating it afresh. New understandings arise from the way this material is reconfigured into different patterns shaped by the interaction between human beings in the context of particular sociocultural practices. Crotty draws on the concept of intentionality (highlighting its Latin origin, *tendere*, to move towards), as it is understood within phenomenology, to refute arguments that constructionism is a subjectivist epistemology. The yoking together of intentional acts with existing objects – however diverse the intentional acts may be, however multifaceted in material or ideal terms the object may be – establishes an existential bond which can then be scrutinised. ‘The world and objects in the world may be in themselves meaningless; yet they are our partners in the generation of meaning and need to be taken seriously ... Objectivity and subjectivity need to be brought together and held together indissolubly’ (*ibid.*, p. 44). What about the argument that whilst constructionism may not be subjectivist it is individualist? Here, Crotty explains the distinctiveness of *social* constructionism, namely that it is a collective enterprise, one which necessarily stems from collaboration and results in meaning-making amongst the group rather than meaning-making by an individual. (For the latter, Crotty reserves the term *constructivism*.) ‘The “social” in social constructionism is about the mode of meaning generation and not about the kind of object that has meaning’ (*ibid.*, p. 55).

How, then, does a social constructionist epistemology shape the kind of research I envisaged? It appears to do so in four particular ways. Firstly, the outline of social constructionism offered above shares many of the characteristics of the reading process to which I subscribe with its acknowledgement of meanings constructed in the transactional process between reader and text, available for discussion, negotiation and re-construction in dialogue with others. When applied to reading within educational contexts, not only does social constructionism enable a stand to be taken against traditional practices of literary criticism; as George Hruby argues, it also sets up a ‘conceptual opposition to traditional work in reading education, informed by cognitive constructivist psychology, that attempt[s] to explain text decoding and reading comprehension by way of models of mental operations’ (Hruby, 2001, p. 58). Writing specifically about the application of social

constructionist perspectives to literacy research, Hruby states that little such work had been undertaken at the time he was writing in 2001. However, if it were to be, it could have significant implications:

With its focus on subjective agency and the constraints and affordances of the organically constituted world, literacy might be reconceived as developmentally entwined with social structures and processes in a fashion far more subtle and complex than anything described to date (*ibid.*).

Methodologically, therefore, my study is shaped by a view of reading as a transactional process embedded within social constructionist epistemology, with implications for both the design of the research methods and analysis of the data.

Secondly, unlike the common representation of reading as an entirely individual, subjective act, a social constructionist approach assumes an integral relationship between the individual and the intersubjective. Although social constructionism is increasingly being applied in a range of disciplines (Lock and Strong, 2010), it has been particularly influential within psychology. Kenneth Gergen is a leading figure in the field who argues for a reconceptualisation of meaning as:

... not within the private mind, but in the process of relating ... let us not view these utterances as reflecting or reporting on an inner world. Rather, let us view them as actions within relationship, actions that gain their meaning through social collaboration (Gergen, 2009, p. 98).

His interests are not solely theoretical; they are also practical. Taking a social constructionist view of the world, then, is not intended simply to be a different way of seeing:

Constructionist ideas are resources for use, not maps or mirrors of the world ... The primary question is, what kind of world can we create together when we place [them] into action?' (*ibid.*, pp. 166-7).

By extension, the apparently solitary reader is, in effect, engaged in a transaction collaboratively with other readers and with wider social practices and cultural values by means of which the text comes into being, for example its authoring, publication, marketing, reception and hence, albeit virtually, with the human beings who enact those practices and adhere to those values. The capacity for establishing ever-expanding connections develops as readers mature, especially (but not solely) if they take up critical positions and read from a range of cultural

perspectives, not just their own. Reading thus seen from a social constructionist perspective implies active rather than passive engagement between people, reading as acting in the world (following Scholes) not merely reflecting on it. Methodologically therefore, research involving readers needs to comprise activity which is intersubjective and socially collaborative.

Thirdly, if reading and social constructionism are connected with one another in this way, it becomes clear that just as readings of the same text will be different for each individual reader, and even, when re-reading, different for the same reader, that will also be the case for the outcome of social constructionist research. It could be argued, therefore, that the outcome is merely individualistic. However, as I have stressed in my engagement with the literature and in my account of why my research was shaped the way it was, I take a view of education (likewise English teaching and reading) in which the relationship between teaching and learning, teacher and learner, reader and text, subject and object, is always reciprocal. Hence I am interested in Crotty's explanation of intentionality and his argument that since it necessitates both subject and object in order to be in play, and since both subject and object exist within cultural parameters, intentionality as conceived of within social constructionism is inevitably critical as compared with constructivism which remains merely individualistic. The distinction Crotty draws between these two epistemological positions is helpful since social constructivism is often loosely used to mean both. He clarifies thus:

Constructivism ... points up the unique experience of each of us. It suggests that each one's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other, thereby tending to scotch any hint of a critical spirit. On the other hand, social constructionism emphasises the hold our culture has on us: it shapes the way in which we see things (even the way in which we feel things!) and gives us a quite definite view of the world. This shaping of our minds by culture is to be welcomed as what makes us human and endows us with the freedom we enjoy ... constructivism tends to resist the critical spirit, while constructionism tends to foster it (Crotty, 2003, p. 58).

Finally, there is a correspondence between social constructionist views of individuals as 'the intersection of multiple relationships' (Gergen, 2009, p. 113), and Massey's concept of space as 'a product of interrelations' (Massey, 2005, p. 10) on which I also draw in this project. The correspondence is their respective recognition of the potential arising from individuals encountering, relating to and

collaborating with one another. However, theorists such as Gergen arguably place greater emphasis on what he calls the 'spaces for dialogue in which *all people* can voice the truths and values of their traditions' (Gergen, 2009, p. 23) as a preface to future action whereas for Massey the space itself, because it is created by the momentum of multiple trajectories, is already a form of action. Thus, the methodology of the research, including the scope and nature of any possible findings, allows for multiple ongoing active engagement over time, not instances captured in single snapshots.

Methodological shaping: 'imagining the field'

Next, I turn my attention to methodology and some of the ideas which shaped the approach I took. In my title, I have used the word *study* because it suggests a number of the characteristics I want to convey, especially the notion of paying close, continuing attention to a topic and scrutinising it from various perspectives. *Study* can also refer to a preliminary trying out of ideas for a more definitive later work. That, too, seems appropriate since there is no sense in which this very small-scale piece of research can possibly claim to be definitive. I hesitate to call it a *case study*, however, for reasons I argue below. Meanwhile, there is another meaning of the word *study* which is relevant, one taken up by Massey in 'Imagining the field' (Massey, 2003), a provocative contribution to a collection of pieces on social theory and research in which she invites the reader to reflect philosophically on the traditional dichotomy between research conducted in the *field* and in the *study*. Referring to the naturalist Georges Cuvier in late eighteenth-, early nineteenth-century France, she rehearses the debates about where researchers are best placed to carry out their work: the study (or in Cuvier's case, the museum) offers distance from the field with the chance to reflect critically, make comparisons, gain perspective; the field, on the other hand, offers the vividness and immediacy of being embedded in a world in action. However, Massey is also concerned with how language itself shapes the researcher's imagination of the field and hence her or his stance towards it. In anthropology, for example, the imagination of the field is:

... a significant element in the articulation of the relationship between the anthropologist and the peoples being studied. It substantially affects, recursively, the nature of the encounter. It is for this reason that addressing the spatio-temporal imaginary within which 'the field' is placed is an important part of doing research (*ibid.*, p. 76).

She dwells on the argument of philosopher Richard Rorty that since language is the only means by which we come to know what we know, we need new vocabularies to articulate new ideas to replace those which have become entrenched or outworn; in Rorty's words, we must make 'an attempt at redescription' (Rorty, 1989, p. 45). Indeed:

... our task as researchers is to produce the new through the process of inventive rearticulation of the language ... 'the field' is not out there waiting to be discovered; rather, it is already linguistically constructed and the researcher's aim must be imaginatively to reformulate this construction in such a way that new avenues can be opened up, new ideas and practices can flow (Massey, 2003, p. 77).

Massey's provocation reinforces my leanings towards social constructionism with her insistence on the field as a construction although she extends the idea through an emphasis on transformation and the potential for change. It also provides an interesting viewpoint from which to consider the context of my research.

A conventional way to characterise my field of study would be along the lines of the description of Cornford offered in Chapter 1, in other words through a representation of what Andrew Brown and Paul Dowling call the 'empirical setting' (Brown and Dowling, 1998, p. 8). Following Massey, however, I do not feel that it forms the most useful way to imagine either the field or its 'spatio-temporal imaginary'. To conceptualise the spatio-temporal imaginary as reading and the field as a school and an English class working with their teacher across four terms would be inadequate. As Massey writes:

Many imaginations of the field have pictured it as static, as synchronic. A revision of that imaginary would make the field itself dynamic; it would make *fieldwork* into a relation between two active agents. It would recognise it as a two-way *encounter* (Massey, 2003, p. 86).

In my situation, then, the *field* would be the space created by the encounter between multiple readers' trajectories, constantly shifting and in transformation. Since the project would be taking place over time it would have both synchronic *and* diachronic dimensions, the spatial and the historical; it would be dynamic, not static; it would be polyphonic. Since the data were generated by habitual, committed readers engaged in reading, a good part of the *field* would extend

beyond the classroom and the school into the spaces of the home as well. Furthermore, much of the data would stem from how people represented the act of reading, not from the physical act of reading itself. The readers' representations, far from being immediately observable, would instead be predominantly communicated through language – verbal, visual, metaphorical – with more of the *virtual* than the *actual* about them. Meanwhile, the *spatio-temporal imaginary* of the study was reading, broadly conceived of as an activity which (as I have already argued) is elusive and contested in its scope, nature and discourse. The *spatio-temporal imaginary* was shaped by my engagement with theories of reading and prior experience of teaching and researching with young people about how reading is perceived and enacted by them. Hence the twin notions of *field* and *spatio-temporal imaginary* were, I would argue, a more apt way to conceive of the research context than as an empirical setting.

The methodological strategy: (case) study

As I have already stated in earlier sections of this thesis, my own development as a teacher has been significantly influenced by other people's case study research. One reason for this may be that the particularity of the case being researched and the way in which it is presented provoke in me as the reader an especially powerful intellectual response, one which sets in motion a process of critical reflection on my own teaching illuminated by the instances about which I read and the researcher's theorised analysis. The reader in effect enacts a form of generalisation (Stake, 1995; Denscombe, 2007). However, it is the very problem of generalisation which exercises so many opponents of case study as an approach. Summaries of its development within educational research, such as Michael Bassey's detailed account in *Case study research in educational settings* (Bassey, 1999), reveal considerable hostility towards case studies along lines reminiscent of arguments against other student-centred educational practices such as teacher assessment or mixed ability grouping in its accusations that they are unduly time-consuming, potentially unwieldy, lacking in rigour and unyielding of generalisation. The perception is that case studies are too localised and domestic for their findings to be readily applicable in other contexts. That argument, however, conforms to positions which privilege the power of global and deny the potential import of the local (Massey, 2005) or, indeed, the idea that '[w]hen we

talk of the global, we are referring to the apparent co-occurrence in different times and places of local practices' (Pennycook, 2010, p. 128).

A different argument against case study research is offered by Brown and Dowling (1998) who query the notion that the singularity of any object of any case study can be bounded:

The fact of the matter is that even a single actor participates in a multiplicity of research sites upon which research acts selectively, which is to say, it samples. To assert that each of the potential research sites is independent of the others is to constitute a radically schizoid subject. The situation becomes even more complicated when the unit of analysis becomes institutional.

There is, in other words, no such thing as 'the case study approach' other than as constituted by the curricularizing of research methods. Within the context of a specific research study, the use of the term 'case' is probably best interpreted as simply a way of describing one's sampling procedures (*ibid.*, p. 166).

They are particularly critical of Robert Stake's work though – strangely – they rely on an unreferenced quotation from an anonymous professorial talk for their characterisation of his work, rather than his work *per se*. However, I am interested in some of the subtlety Stake acknowledges such as that 'Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case' (Stake, 1995, p. ix), the complexity suggesting some agreement with Brown and Dowling's argument that wholeness of a case cannot easily be captured. His comment furthermore acknowledges the connection between case study and constructivism (albeit not social constructionism), namely – as I have already indicated I have myself found – that it provides readers with 'good raw material for their own generalizing. That is due to the fact that the emphasis is on ... not only commonplace description but "thick description"' (*ibid.*, p. 102).

Stake adds a footnote about *thick description*, noting that the term was popularised by anthropologist Clifford Geertz and used for multilayered interpretations of what the actors in a case are doing. Geertz did, indeed, discuss the term at length in the opening chapter of his work, *The interpretation of cultures* (Geertz, 1975). But it is instructive (and relevant to my argument about the particular complexities of researching reading) to go back to the original context in which the term was first used, a talk by Gilbert Ryle entitled 'The

thinker of thoughts: What is *Le Penseur* doing?’ (Ryle, 1968). What Ryle explores is how it might be possible to represent analytically what Rodin’s sculpted figure *Le Penseur* is doing. The thinnest description, what Ryle in a rather banal analogy describes as ‘only the bottom layer of a multi-layered sandwich’ (*ibid.*, p. 2), would be of a man sitting on a rock with his chin resting on his fist. In the remainder of his talk, Ryle considers ways to approach the complex task of creating thick and rich description of any act, both its visible surface features and its more deeply embedded meanings:

A statesman signing his surname to a peace-treaty is doing much more than inscribe the seven letters of his surname, but he is not doing many or any more things. He is bringing a war to a close by inscribing the seven letters of his surname (*ibid.*, p. 10).

If case studies can accommodate this kind of complex representation then it suggests a more nuanced definition of them is needed, focusing on what case studies can accomplish rather than simply where the boundaries are drawn. But what instead appears to be happening – at least within the confines of education – is that debates about case study research, or ‘fetishizing’ as some would have it (Brown and Dowling, 1998, p. 165), have whittled away some of its nuances, leaving it apparently enfeebled.

Looking at earlier writing which explores the potential of case study in educational contexts, the concept regains something of its excitement and freshness. Stenhouse, for example, articulates some of the ideas being generated by him and his colleagues at the Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE) at the University of East Anglia in the 1970s, later disseminated via BERA of which he became president. I have already discussed his interest from a historical perspective. Here, I refer to his work again, this time developing a different argument from it, namely that it is precisely because a case is an instance that it gains stature. He writes:

[The] basis of verification and cumulation in the study of cases is the recognition that a case is an instance, though not, like a sample, a representative, of a class and that case study is the basis for generalisation and hence cumulation of data embedded in time. It is the classic instrument of analytic as opposed to narrative history (Stenhouse, 1978, p. 21).

The advantage of analytic history, he continues, is that:

... it deals in retrospective generalisation rather than predictive generalisation. It is an organisation of experience in retrospect. Retrospective generalisations are attempts to map the range of experience rather than to perceive within that range the operation of laws in the scientific sense (*ibid.*, p. 22).

The next move in his argument, however, offers one possible explanation for the potency I earlier described as deriving from case studies:

In the face of an unfolding experience which is largely unpredictable history attempts to equip us to understand the unpredicted by being able to fit it very rapidly into a systematically ordered and interpreted grasp of experience so far. While predictive generalisations claim to supersede the need for individual judgement, retrospective generalisations seek to strengthen individual judgement where it cannot be superseded (*ibid.*).

Stenhouse's commitment to the development of teachers as researchers, of course, goes some way to explain his strong emphasis here on the value of case study research for classroom practitioners.

Bassey's summary of some of the criticisms of case study nevertheless ends with an acknowledgement of one of Stenhouse's former colleagues at CARE, Helen Simons, writing almost twenty years after Stenhouse about what she still perceives to be one of its essential strengths, namely that the interaction it allows between the individual and the whole, the unique and the universal can be construed as a paradox, not a problem. She argues that we need to welcome the inevitable complexity of the people and situations we research, analysing tensions but not always seeking to resolve them:

Paradox for me is the point of case study. Living with paradox is crucial to understanding. The tension between the study of the unique and the need to generalise is necessary to reveal both the unique and the universal and the unity of that understanding. To live with ambiguity, to challenge certainty, to creatively encounter, is to arrive, eventually, at 'seeing' anew (Simons, 1996, p. 238).

Simons' use of the word 'encounter' reverberates with my interest in Massey's use of the same word described earlier and chimes with an approach to research in which the researcher expects to come up against (to invoke the origin of the word *encounter*) something that is different and to focus on what arises from the meeting between different histories. However, as Simons argues, policy makers

have often shied away from such unpredictable, creative encounters preferring the illusion of the apparently greater certainties to be found in:

... modes of evaluation that derive scientific legitimacy from large samples and which seek to eliminate differences, rather than highlight them, in an attempt to provide evidence that is conclusive. By contrast, case study celebrates the particular and the unique and frequently yields outcomes that are inconclusive. The paradox is that therein lies its strength for policy making, yet this is often seen by policy makers to be its weakness (*ibid.*, p. 227).

Although the inconclusiveness that Simons readily acknowledges is a likely outcome of my own study, the idea that it is a potential strength rather than weakness is also part of the premise of my argument, in keeping epistemologically with concepts about reading and education which I have already outlined above. Bassey argues that this kind of outcome can lead to what he terms 'a fuzzy generalization':

This is the kind of statement which makes no absolute claim to knowledge, but hedges its claims with uncertainties ... The fuzzy generalisation arises from studies of singularities and typically claims that *it is possible, or likely, or unlikely that* what was found in the singularity will be found in similar situations elsewhere: it is a qualitative measure (Bassey, 1999, p. 12).

However, for Bassey, this way of viewing generalisation is not an end in itself. The point is to re-establish a more substantial presence for case study in educational research precisely *because of* its potential ambiguity of outcome, not *in spite of* it, something for which I have already argued earlier. My approach in this particular study therefore has much in common with some of the above representations of case study, but I agree with Brown and Dowling's reservations about circumscribing a 'case', as is evident in my discussion of the issue of sampling and data gathering below. I have therefore chosen to continue to allude to the project as a study, rather than a case study, nonetheless acknowledging the relationship between the two.

In this chapter, I have firstly discussed why it was important to undertake my research into young people's reading in an educational setting and from within an English classroom. Drawing strongly on sociocultural theories of language and learning, Vygotsky's in particular, I have argued that despite the ephemerality of the reading process, the English classroom is still the place within schools where

students can most be expected to study texts for their own sake and it is thus an appropriate context within which to initiate reflection on reading histories and wider readership beyond the confines of school. I have then traced the epistemological sources of the research to social constructionism and shown how this stance has informed the methodology of the project and the way the spatio-temporal imaginary and the field are conceptualised. In Chapter 4, I elaborate on the design of the research, discussing issues of sampling and the development of the four distinctive research methods by means of which I aimed to address my research questions. I also consider some of the ethical issues involved before turning my attention to analysis of the data.

4 DESIGNING THE RESEARCH

In what follows, I trace the design of the research from choosing which school to work with through to the development of the specific research methods I used. An unusual feature of the research was that all four methods were developed to form the means by which to generate qualitative data which were valuable in terms of both pedagogy and research. I argue that this dual approach renders the validity of the research more secure than using methods such as questionnaires with multiple-choice answers or rating scales with comparatively little to motivate students' thinking about the relevant domain of knowledge, in this case reading. Instead, because the research methods were also designed to be pedagogically rich, I anticipated that the data would likewise be interestingly textured and recognisably authentic in the eyes of fellow professionals. The approach, however gave rise to certain ethical issues and I therefore conclude the chapter by discussing those of which I needed to take particular account.

Choosing a school: purposive sampling

I had a number of ideas about teachers I might approach to see whether it would be possible to carry out research with their classes. Over many years, my interest in young people's reading has led me to conduct small-scale projects in different schools. Requests to do so have always been granted, perhaps not surprisingly since I have always asked teachers who are particularly interested in the development of their students as readers. I therefore decided to approach similarly keen teachers of reading on this occasion as well and had various people in mind. In order to make a decision, I prioritised factors that were desirable but, in keeping with the practice of purposive sampling of being deliberately 'selective and biased' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p. 104), two were essential: to work with students in the twelve- to thirteen-year-old age range and with habitual, committed readers (as defined in Chapter 1).

Whilst compiling a list of people to approach, a teacher called Rosa Banbury (not her real name) expressed a keen interest in my research and volunteered to help in any way she could. I had met Rosa as a result of our involvement in the same initial teacher education programme. In conversation, I discovered that she was a passionate reader herself but as a child had been deprived of reading both at home

and at the secondary modern school she attended which she described as having failed her. It was not until she studied for A levels as a mature student that, thanks to one particular teacher, her attitude was profoundly changed. Her subsequent hunger for reading was palpable and her conversation frequently turned to particular books she was currently enjoying, her own children as readers, or her work in school organising the annual sponsored Readathon. She had a class library of her own books which she enthusiastically recommended to students (mainly novels for teenagers and adults since she seemed less interested in promoting non-literary reading material such as magazines). Students were always free to borrow from the class library. When she volunteered to help, she was teaching a Year 8 group of students deemed by the school to be high-achieving in English on the basis of their Year 6 National Curriculum test results and Year 7 teachers' assessment of their progress. There were plenty of students in the class whom she said she would describe as keen readers and who, on the basis of her knowledge of them as their English teacher, she thought would readily describe themselves in similar terms. I therefore decided to undertake a pilot study with as many of the class as were willing to be involved and began designing the project. Although at the time, I imagined that six or eight would eventually emerge to participate in the full study, once I became clear about, and interested in, the diversity and fluctuating enthusiasms of different members of the group I was keen to retain all those willing to remain involved as potential subjects. It called into question the assumption of stability implied by those who urge that sampling must be 'planned and deliberate' (*ibid.*, p. 104). However, continuing to work with as many of the group as possible arguably strengthened the validity of the research since the sample retained its profile as a whole English class and data were generated by a wider range of different readers than just a select few.

Devising the research methods

In the next section of this chapter I describe how the four main research methods were devised to address the research questions. I also discuss the practical issues that needed consideration from both ethical and pedagogical perspectives. I refer to the fieldnotes I kept throughout the period during which I worked with Rosa and her class, as well as emails she and I exchanged as we planned the classroom-based work. Ethics approval documentation is included as appendices and will be referred to at relevant points in the discussion.

Research method 1: making critical incidents collages

In the first planning meeting with Rosa, having spoken broadly about the project I envisaged, I added that a particular concern with research such as this was ‘how to get students thinking and talking about themselves as readers so that the issue is at the forefront of their attention and, possibly, an ongoing “talking point” during the research period’ (Fieldnotes 03.05.07). To that end, I suggested beginning the project by doing a *critical incidents* activity which students could use to reflect on what we called their personal reading ‘journeys’ to date. I gleaned the idea for the activity from hearing and reading about the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) project, ‘Consulting pupils about teaching and learning’. The researchers used a range of methods to prompt students to discuss and reflect on their knowledge and understanding of schooling, including a number of image-based techniques to encourage them ‘to represent what they know, feel and think about what they know – and to help them to talk’ (Burnard, 2002, p. 2). The particular technique I decided to adopt is commonly referred to as ‘the river of experience’:

The river of experience is a reflexive tool since pupils, on their own or with the help of the researcher, draw it in ways that they feel are appropriate, linking it to critical incidents or moments in their lives: each bend of the river’s path marks a critical incident (*ibid.*).

In the context of the reading journey collages, we took ‘critical incidents’ to mean special moments or key reading experiences – as Rosa termed them when talking about the activity with the class – through which the students felt their readership might have been shaped. Thus a critical incident might be a habitual social practice such as being read aloud to, the discovery of a new favourite author, the pleasure of sustained reading of a much-loved series, recollection of a challenging text which developed them as readers, or ongoing social relationships with other readers in some way salient. Although initially I planned to use this critical incidents method as a preliminary to extended small-group interviews, when Rosa and I discussed it, it became clear that she thought it would be more valuable if time was devoted to it, giving students proper opportunity to think back to their earliest memories of reading, to talk with families at home and create a more substantial artefact than a mere sketch. It thus became a research method in its own right. Her pedagogical interest in the idea led to two further additions to the planning: one was that rather than drawing the rivers of experience, as I had done

when using this technique with adults, Rosa (an art graduate) suggested the students should produce collages; the other linked idea was that she would stimulate their thinking with a class activity prior to their embarking on their collages. Although she did not articulate reasons for making collages rather than drawings, other than that it was something she quite often encouraged, it proved to be a significant suggestion. As Ruth Leitch argues, albeit in a very different research context in which she sought to understand young people's experiences of political conflict (Leitch, 2008), using creative techniques like collage-making generates talk both in the process of making the artefacts themselves and afterwards when they can be used as prompts for reflective discussion. For adolescents in particular, she continues, making a collage:

... does not stimulate individual concerns about artistic ability. This is a particularly important consideration when undertaking image-based or creative research with adolescents who may be resistant to drawing tasks ... Selecting materials, images and phrases from magazines and newspapers to symbolize views on any issue seems to be a more immediately engaging and practical process (*ibid.*, p. 44).

However, it is also important to be mindful of the constraints as well as the opportunities of collage-making as a research method, not least when it is initiated from within school as it was in this case. As Harry Daniels discusses in his analysis of art work displayed in different schools (Daniels, 2001), and as Sarah Bragg and David Buckingham point out in their experience of using scrapbook-making as a research method, this kind of technique is not:

... a neutral tool, but highly contingent ... young people [come] to the task of making them with a history – of academic and media experience, of familiarity with different cultural forms and conventions – and different degrees of awareness of the institutional context of the research or of the audience for which they were writing (Bragg and Buckingham, 2008, p. 127).

Therefore, when I later analysed the collages as data rather than simply using them as prompts for thinking and talking, I was mindful of the audience, context and purpose of their production which was, potentially at least, threefold, namely for research, for school purposes and personal, or to quote Rosa: 'something you can treasure and keep for your own memories' (Fieldnotes 16.05.07).

Before I went into the school to observe the collage-making lesson, Rosa introduced a preparatory class activity. The following extract from her email to me afterwards, captures her enthusiasm and creative thinking. I quote at some length because it offers a flavour of her commitment to the theme of the project and, as became clear when I analysed the students' work, shows how the activity may have helped stimulate reciprocal creativity from many of them. Keen to provoke thought but not slavish imitation, she wrote:

We had so much fun! I decided that I would not prepare in Blue Peter fashion ('one I prepared earlier') as this would influence them. So I wrote out 13 parts of my life ie being a mummy, at uni etc and took in loads of books (it nearly killed me!!). 13 students had to put my life in order (standing in a row) the rest of the class tried to rearrange them and then I told them (they hadn't put uni in the right place – they think all teachers are educated from birth!). Then the rest of the class had to place the books where they thought I would have been reading them. It was loud, exciting and full of fun – they mentioned that I'd failed to include getting married to Jack (although I had included loving Bernard the dog!) so I confessed that I hadn't had time to read! Much hilarity from which I could point out that the journey is about reading and anything that has affected their reading should be included. Their homework was to research their own reading and to investigate the reading of parents and grandparents (Email correspondence 13.05.07).

Three days later, the next time the class had English, I joined them to observe their collage-making lesson. Since it was my first introduction to the class and the only English lesson I formally observed, I draw again on my fieldnotes to try and convey a sense of the group and the way they worked that day. (Students' names have been changed to ensure anonymity. I offered students the chance to select their own pseudonyms. However, I later made the decision to override some of their choices because they were causing too much 'interference', making the class sound very unlikely in social, cultural and historical terms.)

The classroom was not large and, with thirty-one students and the desks arranged in rows, it felt crowded. An image of a pile of books with the word 'Reading?' underneath was projected onto the whiteboard. The stated lesson objective was 'To identify key reading experiences in my life'. It was clear from comments to Rosa made by Bekki and Andie on arrival that they had not only done their research for homework but had already created their collages. For the benefit of one or two absentees, however, Rosa quickly recapped the homework task which had been for the students to think about their whole life and special moments

where reading had come into it. As an example of a special moment, Rosa cited the recent arrival of her first grandchild to whom she read when she was just a few hours old. Abigail said that meeting a writer for the first time had got her into reading Susan Cooper books. Another student volunteered that at the time of her parents' divorce she began reading Jacqueline Wilson books. Rosa then reminded the class that she wanted them to create a 'reading journey' and asked what kinds of things could symbolise different elements of such a journey. A river was one suggestion, a mountain (representing rocky times) another. The class were reminded of what materials were available for them to use: serendipity meant a collection of school book club catalogues being thrown out by another member staff had been rescued by Rosa and brought along to add to the tissue paper, bits of material, wax crayons and so on which had already been assembled.

The students seemed relaxed and enjoyed making their collages with a great deal of talk between them. They adapted the idea of the river as metaphor, producing roller-coasters, kites and railway tracks to mark their distinctive approaches, indicating that the way Rosa set up activities encouraged independence rather than conformity. A group I was sitting near – Bekki, Abigail, Thomas and Luke – discussed the book club catalogues as they cut them up, for example picturebooks they remembered reading or popular novels they were currently enjoying. The catalogues reminded students of books they might otherwise have forgotten, acting as a valuable *aide-mémoire* but not unduly influencing which texts they included in their collages.

Twenty collages were handed to me a week or so later. The remaining third were not completed because the students departed on a geography field trip to Iceland. By the time they returned, there had been a half term break and Rosa had been signed off for the remainder of the term for an operation and subsequent convalescence. There was not, therefore, an opportunity for her to build on the collage work in her English lessons on this occasion. Nor did the students bring them to the small-group interviews we later had, though they were referred to from time to time. Nevertheless, those I received provided very interesting evidence which, as I argue in Chapter 5, suggests their value as a form of data for analysis. Furthermore, since some of the critical incidents, texts and authors were later revisited in the group interviews or in the interviews with parents and

grandparents, they provided one way to corroborate data generated by different methods.

Research method 2: semi-structured small-group interviews

During the seven weeks when Rosa was absent, the school continued to allow me to visit during the class's English lessons and to interview a group of four or five students on each occasion (Appendix 1: Interview groups). The cover supervisor booked classrooms so the interviews could be conducted in relative privacy. Each interview was audio- and video-recorded, apart from the final one when a double-booking meant moving to the library where, since the space was being prepared for an imminent Year 6 visit, it was not possible to video the discussion and audio-recording had to suffice.¹

Interviews were semi-structured, using the same outline questions and prompts but designed to allow considerable scope for discussion and not necessarily asked in the same order each time (Appendix 2: Interview questions and prompts). The decision to structure the interviews in this way was not without tensions: on the one hand, offering each member of the group a chance to address the same questions had the potential largely to encourage what psychologist Neil Mercer, drawing on extensive empirical research into language and thinking, calls *cumulative* discussion (Mercer, 2000) with students shoring up each other's prior contributions, rather than being more *exploratory*, engaging 'critically but constructively with each other's ideas' (*ibid.*, p. 98). On the other hand – importantly – it offered them time to gather their thoughts and the chance to return to the same point at a later stage to modify or amplify prior responses, arguably enhancing the validity of the data as they refined or modified their earlier, more impulsive contributions. Nevertheless, there was also a danger that ensuring group members had an opportunity to address each question meant coherent lines of thinking and inquiry would not necessarily develop (Alexander, 2008b). In the analysis of the interview data, it was therefore interesting and important to reflect on whether individuals were merely generating discussion cumulatively or whether, even when in agreement with their peers, they were doing so from a

¹ Video-recording offered the potential for further ways to analyse the interviews and acted as a back-up in case the audio-recording failed. It was not, however, used at all in the data analysis.

more exploratory position. The point is one I return to and explore in greater depth in Chapter 6.

At the start of each interview I re-introduced myself to the group and explained why I was interested to discuss their reading with them. I framed my intentions within my role as a teacher educator interested in researching young people as readers, especially those – like them – who *do* read. I added that although I was recording everything, if there was anything they did not want to say or wanted to keep private that would be fine. Finally, I explained the convention of changing research participants' names as well as the school's so that if I wrote or talked about my work afterwards, their anonymity would be retained. At the end of each interview I asked them whether there were any questions they wanted to ask me. Their questions were usually about what I liked reading, how often I read, how many books I read a year, but they were also interested to know what I would do with the data generated by the research.

In terms of the research design, these interviews were always intended to play an important role. In part, that was because I already knew the potential of this kind of interviewing as a method which would almost certainly create rich data. I also thought it likely that the interviews might help identify the most committed readers in the class who would ultimately form the central focus of the research. Nevertheless, I was aware that the sampling process would probably not be straightforward. Given the pedagogical basis of the research, and the hope that it would be a worthwhile experience for the participants, it seemed likely that there would be an ethical issue involved if ultimately just a few students were selected to pursue it further, unless of course enough voluntarily withdrew themselves. At this stage, however, only one opted out, a student with autism who never participated in activities which involved him collaborating with other people. Twenty-four of the thirty remaining members of the class sample were then interviewed. The other six were unable to be interviewed because they were not available at the times I was working at the school e.g. due to absence, school sports events and so on, not – as far as I was aware – because they did not want to be involved. On the basis of my observation in the collage-making lesson, and then of the collages themselves, I suggested some possible groupings for the first three interviews with students swapping in and out as they wished. Bekki,

Abigail, Thomas and Luke formed one of the groups, for example. This arrangement meant that sometimes, but not always, at least two members of each group were friends and therefore likely to know one another as readers. Out of the twenty-four, only one girl was not very forthcoming, ironically one of the most prolific readers in the class who had, in the lesson I observed, received one of the two awards issued for reading the most books in that year's Readathon. Rosa explained that she was always quiet and that her unwillingness to offer extensive contributions was in character, so her stance may not have been an effect of the interview situation.

I appreciated the willingness of the school's senior management team to accommodate me during Rosa's absence. It was nevertheless interesting to note what happened when I arrived in a different designated classroom each time to set up the room for the interviews. The teacher whose classroom it was usually appeared unaware her or his room had been commandeered for the lesson which resulted in some varied reactions. Understandably, their response was often slight irritation at the prospect of having to vacate the room, but that usually changed to one of interest when I explained the nature and purpose of my research. On more than one occasion it led to the teacher reflecting on his own (and his own children's) reading preferences. However, on one occasion it led to a more negative reaction. On the second day of interviewing, I found myself in the Head of Year's classroom. He was interested to know which students I was interviewing. I told him their names and he expressed surprise, 'verbally raising his eyebrows at one or two' as I later noted (Fieldnotes 08.06.07). I interpreted it as a possible indicator that he knew little about his year group as readers, given the lively and illuminating discussion that was shortly to follow. In the case of the library lesson, it was obvious that our presence was not very welcome at such a busy moment, but afterwards, when the librarian realised what was being discussed, she reacted much more positively. The students themselves, in that particular context, appeared uninhibited by the presence of other adults in the room during the interview, as the recording and transcript demonstrate.

Recently, there has been much critical discussion about the scope and nature of interviewing as a research method. Hammersley is particularly critical of its use, especially if it is the only method used and the data generated are taken at face

value (Hammersley, 2008) neither of which were to be the case in this instance. Others more sympathetic to its use in qualitative research, for example Andrea Fontana and James Frey (2008), suggest that interviewing has not only moved away from being a situation in which an allegedly neutral interviewer elicits objective information from respondents; it has also moved beyond being a situation in which an empathetic interviewer gains insight from interviewees through identifying as closely as possible with them. Rather:

... we have reached the point of the interview as negotiated text ... Interviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in an interaction with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place (*ibid.*, p. 144).

This characterisation comes close to what I was attempting to achieve, embodying as it does a social constructionist stance. I had basic questions prepared which would give shape to the discussions and mean that each interview would move in roughly the same directions. However, there was considerable room for manoeuvre within the semi-structured framework and, with the unpredictability of the groupings themselves and different individuals involved on each occasion, plenty of opportunity for divergence and distinctiveness which was, after all, something to which I was keen to pay attention. I discuss the interview as a negotiated accomplishment further when I analyse the data.

As has already been explained, the interviews were systematically conducted within a specific educational setting because of the strong pedagogical imperatives underpinning the research as a whole and the desire to see to what extent, if at all, the methods I used had the potential to be educative. Because the interviews took place during allocated English time, they were clearly framed as an adjunct to the English curriculum. Although we moved out of the English classroom for the interviews, we still adopted a formal arrangement, the group sitting round a table so that they were all in the frame of the camcorder and facing me. Despite the relative formality of the situation, the students did not seem ill at ease, though one or two were more reticent to speak than others. They took an interest in the technology and – since the interviews were voluntary – seemed generally eager to respond to my questions.

The sessions lasted not more than forty-five minutes each. All six groups sustained their concentration and interest throughout. It is, of course, a longer period of time than a single group of students will normally spend in sustained and uninterrupted discussion with a teacher in lesson time which might only happen on occasions when a small group is identified to work with a teacher or teaching assistant as part of a guided reading session, for example. Such a discussion would usually take place within the same physical space as the rest of the class and would therefore be neither private nor interruption-proof. The recordings enable very close attention to be paid to what a small group of students have to say and any perceptible shifts that take place over time as they become accustomed to the context and purpose of the interview. The potential impact that such an uninterrupted stretch of time and attention can have on the scope and nature of the discussion is a point to which I return in Chapter 6.

As I have already indicated, the strengths and limitations of interviewing as a research method have been much debated over the past couple of decades. Of particular interest in terms of my own study is an early analysis by Ann Lewis (1992) of the shift away from one-to-one research interviews in favour of group interviews, a move which chimes with increased attention at the time to social rather than individualistic theories of psychological development. Although she argues that they may enable the emergence of a consensus, this is a position I am deliberately eschewing and her finding that they also lead to 'the challenging (and so clarification/extension) of individuals' responses by others in the group and the stimulation of new ideas' (*ibid.*, p. 414) is more directly supportive of my aims. However, she glosses quickly over 'the effects of interviewer characteristics on interviewees' (*ibid.*, p. 416) as already well-documented elsewhere. Nevertheless, in an instance like this it is important to consider the issue in more detail.

Firstly, it could be argued that in order to encourage the interviewees to be most forthcoming, the best kind of interviewer would be someone with whom the students could readily identify, someone perhaps closer to them in age and even the same gender. However, from my own prior experience of interviewing students of this age and informed by theories of dialogic teaching and learning, I want to argue differently. When interviewing once a group of keen skateboarders, I came up against the problem of not understanding the terminology they were

using to tell me about the magazines and books they read about their hobby. Seemingly innocent words like 'deck' threatened to trip us up and I therefore asked for an explanation. The students, positioned as a group of experts, were compelled to be explicit in ways they would not have been had they been talking with an insider, eager to define and clarify their terms in order to help me understand, confident in their solidarity. In keeping with theories of talk informing this study (Bakhtin, 1986; Mercer, 2000; Nystrand, 2006; Alexander, 2008b), the group interview therefore has the potential not only to extend the thinking and understanding of the speakers through the very process of generating data but also, if the interviewer is unfamiliar with what information they contribute to the event, to enable them to position themselves differently, as authorities not novices. This argument evokes the findings of Martin Nystrand's study of how genuine questioning in the classroom, where the questioners do not already know the answers, leads to greater chance of dialogue and open-ended discussion:

The study ... found that such discourse "moves" as authentic (open-ended) teacher questions and uptake (follow-up questions) significantly enhanced the probability of both discussion and dialogic "spells" (Nystrand, 2006, p. 403).

Secondly, it was also necessary that my role as interviewer enabled students to feel comfortable and secure enough to talk openly with each other. They were having to navigate not only such two-way power relations as might exist between me as inquirer and them as experts, but also between one another as peers: in a context such as this, there might have been reasons why they felt less inhibited towards the outsider whom they did not know and whom they did not expect to meet again than towards those they daily engaged with as classmates and friends outside school. Whilst I had prepared questions intended to take the talk in specific directions, I wanted to leave open the possibility of venturing along other relevant avenues. There was also considerable negotiation required to ensure fairness in turn-taking, especially when the groups became animated about a topic.

Thirdly, listening to the recordings afterwards, transcribing and analysing them, I was aware that my own role in the process of each interview was influential in the extent to which I became, in Fontana and Frey's words, an active participant in

the discussion with the students (Fontana and Frey, 2008). My comments in those instances, as with everything else I said – consciously or unwittingly – provided signals to which the students responded. In some cases, such contributions gave rise to further interesting responses; in others they foreshortened contributions. Perhaps the key question is to what extent anything I said might be criticised as ‘leading’. My argument would be that this question belongs to a different research paradigm; the one I espouse – social constructionism – works with whatever *is* said and whatever is created out of what is said, firstly by the speakers and then by the analyst. It is not about searching for truths *behind* the words. Nor does it assume that what is said is *the* truth either. Rather, the spoken discourse could be said to represent *a* truth, or several possible truths, each capable of being triangulated with data from the other methods with their own distinct potential for prompting thought in particular ways (for example an appreciative inquiry stance encouraging respondents to focus on success rather than failure). Most importantly, though, the notion of students responding passively to leading questions denies any agency on their part. Evidence from the interviews suggests that these students were entirely capable of making independent responses. In such instances, the statements with which they disagreed became an opportunity for them to take up a contrary position. Leading questions are therefore, perhaps, more a feature of tightly circumscribed research methods than I was using within this project. Moreover, as I have already argued in Chapter 3, my research was driven by the specific intention of finding out more about what young readers thought, not ratifying foregone conclusions. Leading questions which merely shored up already known positions would have gone against the grain of my investigation. Instead, any such statements or questions articulated by me might more readily be described as borrowing from appreciative inquiry method for which the starting point is valuing what already works well with a view to analysing and thereafter extending it (Hammond, 1998; Carnell, 2004; 2005).

Nevertheless, it remains the case that my role within the interviews was predominantly interrogatory and that every question was imbued in some way or other with the epistemology, theoretical perspectives and values I espouse and brought with me to the research. It should also be noted, though, that my key questions were open-ended and a genuine attempt to find out something I did not already know (Nystrand, 2006; Alexander, 2008b) and therefore the answers were

never entirely predictable so the discussion which followed could, and often did, develop in a multiplicity of directions.

By the end of the group interviews, I was no nearer identifying which members of the class would become the sample for the remainder of my study. In part, their willingness to participate made it difficult to contemplate being selective; in part, I sensed that the two methods I had so far employed were insufficient to address all the research questions in which I was interested and that to continue working with as many of the group as possible for the next stage of the project would therefore be desirable. With Rosa's enthusiastic agreement, that is what I did.

Research method 3: students' semi-structured interviews with a parent, carer or grandparent

On the basis of prior research evidence – my own and other people's – I came to this project expecting families to have some part to play in the way the students' readership is constructed, but keen to understand more about what that part might be. The shaping of readers' identities in relation to parents and other family members was therefore something the students were asked to consider from the outset when preparing for their reading journey collages. It was clear from the collages they produced that the invitation to research their reading histories at home yielded some rich personal memories and recollections. However, in analysing the collages and the interviews, the issue of memory is particularly pertinent. Fontana and Frey raise it as a key point in their discussion of interviewing as a research method:

Relevant to the study of oral history (and, in fact to all interviewing) is the study of memory and its relation to recall (Fontana and Frey, 2008, p. 134).

They refer briefly to Barry Schwartz's theories about the social foundations of memory which are worth reviewing in more detail here. Schwartz's thesis is that:

As we reflect on our lives, we find ourselves remembering our lives in terms of our experiences with others. This is why the content of what we remember and forget is a sociological puzzle ... The past, it is true, is stored in individual minds, but what is stored and how it is stored are determined socially (Schwartz, 1999, p. 144).

Although Schwartz's interest lies in individual memories of shared community experiences (in his case of World War II), the more general argument about the relationship between individual memory and social experience is one which I found helpful when later analysing the data.

The issue of memory is also highly pertinent to oral history research discussed by Gardner (2003; 2010) although his emphasis shifts from how memories might have been formed to how respondents position themselves differently in relation to what they are remembering. The key distinction Gardner finds it helpful to make in oral history interviews, acknowledging the influence of Paul Ricoeur's philosophy on his thinking, is between life stories and the historical landscapes of which they form a part. Two terms are central to his argument: *repetition* and *recollection*. Repetition is closely aligned with individual life stories, narratives of familiar events which interviewees may already have told themselves (and others) over and over again until they form part of their innate sense of identity. Recollection, on the other hand, is used to refer to responses to questions about occurrences which for some reason or other disrupt the smooth flow of the repeated narrative and require interviewees to reposition themselves, to view things from a new and different perspective: from being the 'insider looking out', he or she becomes the 'outsider looking in' (Gardner, 2003, p. 186). This transition is reminiscent of Scholes's description of the reading process, notably the shifts which occur when something disrupts a reader's absorption and requires an interpretive or critical stance to be adopted instead. In Gardner's scheme, when there is a transition between repetition and recollection, there is also a shift required of the researcher. His argument is that whilst life stories prompt hermeneutics as their main analytical response, recollected occurrences are more likely to require historical explanation. Once again, the shift is from the interpretive to the critical. Where repetition of life stories is concerned, the researcher is heavily reliant on analysing the speech acts (or discourse) of the respondent whereas for incidents of recollection the analysis may be more concerned with truth claims. However, taking a social constructionist approach to interpreting data means focusing on whatever material emerges; whether or not such memories as are offered are true or not is not so much an issue as asking what kind of memories are being offered and hence the meanings they might accrete.

Although there were several arguments for attending in this project to the ways in which parents and families related to how students' reading lives were shaped, there was an additional reason for wanting to bring some of those individuals more fully into the picture. That reason was my interest in the historical trajectories of the students as readers and how their trajectories might be illuminated by exploring some of those alongside which they were being created. It was also an idea which particularly appealed to Rosa with her own very mixed experiences of such reading relationships in her own life.

As I began to formulate this third stage of the research, I reflected on work I had done much earlier in my English teaching career which encouraged children to interview their parents and grandparents to find out more about their own histories so they could include a more distant past in their autobiographical writing (Cliff Hodges, 1989). Though not unproblematic, especially in terms of writing the interviews up afterwards, the task had usually been done enthusiastically by students, with older family members willing to participate and enjoying talking with their children or grandchildren about their own childhoods. The students were younger than those in my present study, though, and had struggled to shape the evidence they gathered into coherent written form. Furthermore, I felt at the time, 'Because of the highly personal connection of the writers with their subjects there was an understandable unwillingness, even an inability, to distance themselves very much from the people about whom they were writing' (*ibid.*, p. 169), so I was alert to this same potential difficulty occurring again. However, I also noted that 'There was still a definite sense of the children being in control of their material, because they were the custodians of their parents' and grandparents' memories and reflections' (*ibid.*). Asking the students to conduct their own interviews within this current project therefore seemed an interesting possibility, but one which needed considerable forward planning for various reasons. First and foremost, it would need another layer of permissions to be sought, this time from the interviewees. Secondly, and also very importantly, it needed planning as a teaching task in its own right. Rosa was back at work so we met to discuss the draft interview schedule I had drawn up for the students to use, aligning some of the questions with those I had already used in the semi-structured interviews, adding others from which further detail could emerge. Rosa's knowledge of the class, who had (with one or two changes) become her

Year 9 English class (now thirty in number), proved invaluable, especially in terms of work they had already done on the difference between open and closed questions and her view that some of the questions I was suggesting could be made more challenging (Fieldnotes 06.12.07). In the light of her comments I redrafted them and incorporated the interviewee consent form into a booklet of guidance (Appendix 3: Student interview guidance). The students were also invited to contribute questions of their own so spaces were left for them to do so.

The solution I proposed to the problem of shaping their material was to use some already published interviews as exemplars. To that end, I selected several interviews with children's authors from the Write Away website (www.writeaway.org.uk). As well as being of interest in their own right, especially since those I selected were with authors likely to appeal to the students (Randa Abdel-Fattah, Anne Fine, Linda Newbery, Louise Rennison, Michael Rosen and Darren Shan), they were valuable in terms of their structure. Each begins with brief biographical details before moving to specific questions (Appendix 4: Written interview exemplar). Rosa planned a sequence of lessons for the students working in small groups, each with copies of a different author's interview which I provided for her, to create a presentation for the rest of the class. The students then conducted their own interviews over the period of the Christmas holiday, wrote them up and handed them in early in January. All thirty students passed on their finished work for me to read and respond to although in two cases consent forms were not returned and in two further cases they were returned unsigned so these four responses have not been included in the data analysis. For the remainder, I have given the adults pseudonyms which I deemed to be as much in keeping as possible with their real names and their approximate ages.

Students had used a variety of interview techniques. Some had talked with the interviewee, using the booklet to make notes, and then written up the interviews afterwards. A few had handed over the booklet for the adults to write in. Several had adapted the questions, possibly to better suit the interviewee. Most, however, had recorded and transcribed the interviews verbatim so the respondents' voices are quite vividly represented on the page, including gap-fillers and hesitations as they think their way through their responses. (Quotations from the interviews are

therefore reproduced using students' original spelling and punctuation.) Occasionally, traces of dialect offer subtle hints about possible social background. One student even attempted to capture accent in the transcription. In response to the question 'What kind of books would you hate to read?', Kirsty represents her grandmother Betty's reply as follows:

Betty: I would hate to read them books you get about murderers' minds ... I find 'em sick, I don't like horror or horror fantasy, autobiography's, biography's or books on history other than war. I don't like reading horror because I jump if the phone goes off, you know wha' I'm like dontcha.

The data, therefore, presented challenges for analysis since in some cases they formed a spectrum of spoken and written language although on the whole the responses were shaped by the dynamic of a structured interview rather than as a more free-flowing conversation. However, it remained my intention to use similar analytical approaches to those I employed for the small-group discussions, bringing to bear a variety of close, critical reading techniques which I consider in more detail when I address the issue of analytical procedures in Chapter 5.

Research method 4: students writing an individual reading journal

The final research method involved students writing an individual reading journal whilst reading a book of their choice. Before telling the class that the idea was, once again, linked to my research project it was introduced into English lessons with Rosa teaching a lesson, jointly planned with me, on Roald Dahl's short story, 'The Landlady' from *Tales of the Unexpected* (Dahl, 1979). The students were asked to record their developing ideas – in writing and drawing – at key points before, during and after reading the story. Initially, about a third of the class expressed reluctance but, having tried it out, only one student still insisted she found it an uninteresting thing to do. Rosa thought that when she told them the following lesson about the task, having sent them away to find a good book to bring in, the fact that it was an ongoing link with my research project 'might even bring Jessica round' (Email correspondence 24.06.08).

Since Rosa had not used reading journals before, I talked through with her how I envisaged they might be used within this context. The ideas I suggested also formed the basis of the guidance booklet I produced for the students (Appendix 5:

Student reading journal guidance). In it, I addressed questions about what to read, what a reading journal is, when are the best times to write in the journal, what styles of writing might be used and a rationale for keeping them. The idea drew in particular on practice developed by David Jackson (1982a; 1982b; 1983) when he was leading a forward-looking English department in Nottinghamshire in the 1980s. In an attempt to make explicit the ways reader-response theory could support the teaching of literature, he introduced reading journals in the classroom to capture students' initial, hesitant responses to a text. The one way in which the journals departed from my own prior experience of using them was in not expecting that they would form a written dialogue between the teacher and each individual reader since I was unwilling to generate additional work for Rosa. However, I made a commitment to respond myself to anyone who allowed me to use their completed journals for my research. (Appendix 6: Example of journal response). I received twenty-three journals, a slightly smaller contribution than for the interviews with parents and grandparents. Although most students willingly completed the consent form (Appendix 7: Reading journal consent form) and several asked for an extension in order to continue writing their journals over the summer holiday, a few were either unable to sustain their motivation for that long or, in a couple of cases, expressly said that this time they did not want their work to be used in the research project. The process of collecting the completed journals became arduous for Rosa since by the time the students were ready to hand them in they were in Year 10 and she was no longer their English teacher. However, as they came in they were forwarded on to me.

The journals were completed in A4 exercise books. Only a few included drawings; where relevant, these have been considered alongside the writing as part of the data analysis in Chapter 8. The decision to ask students to write their journals by hand in book form rather than as a blog, for example, was deliberate. A journal has to be easily accessible if entries are to be written immediately before or after a period of reading, whether at school in English lessons or at home. Students needed to be able to write them in a variety of places such as the classroom, their bedroom, the garden and, since the work continued over the summer holiday, possibly away from home as well. Unless they had a laptop almost permanently with them, that would be difficult. However, the purpose and audience for the journal were even more important factors. Blogs assume a more

public, interactive form of communication than I required in this instance (Carrington, 2008). As I explained to the students in the journal guidance, one of the main purposes of keeping a journal is to capture fleeting responses during the process of reading a text which might otherwise be forgotten. Because these responses are committed in writing, they remain available for subsequent critical reflection, an important consideration not only for the students as readers but for me as researcher. But essentially, they are intended initially to be private not public, a space to consider ideas, pursue independent lines of inquiry and allow time for reflection before sharing thoughts more widely. A deciding factor in using conventional print rather than newer technology was that a key aim of writing journals is to slow down the process of response to reading so that greater reflective depth might be achieved. In an interesting extension to work he undertook with a Year 10 class reading John Branfield's novel, *Nancekuke*, David Jackson sent one student's journal entries to the author for comment. Branfield replied:

As I read Kim's impressions of *Nancekuke*, I am reminded very vividly of when I wrote it. Some readers, children and adult, seem to believe that a novel springs fully-formed from the writer's mind; in fact, the way ahead is often far from clear, and though parts of a book almost write themselves, at other times a choice has to be made between endless possibilities.

This is where the entries in Kim's journal are like the thoughts that go through a writer's mind, but don't get into the book. They are like the notes I write for myself on the opposite side of the manuscript ...

I feel that we have travelled the same path. I wonder if it has helped at all in her own story-writing (Jackson, 1982a, p. 67).

What Branfield as author and Jackson as teacher are interested in, therefore, are thought processes, usually notes to oneself and often relatively private (at least initially), that form such an important part of text production. That was where my interest also lay.

Ethical and additional issues

Before the project began, once Rosa and I had discussed working together, I drew up a series of letters to send to Rosa herself, to the school's principal and to each of the students' parents/carers. Although Rosa responded keenly to my letter and consent form (Appendix 8: Class teacher letter and consent form) I felt it was also

important to write to the principal explaining the rationale for the research as well as the practical implications. I therefore sent a shortened version of the same letter which was signed and returned granting permission, with a handwritten note saying that the project sounded interesting and it was good the school could be involved, but asking that the school's name be changed in any dissemination material. Shortly afterwards, a letter and consent form for parents/carers (Appendix 9: Parent/carer letter and consent form) agreed with Rosa, was sent home via the students. In the letter, at Rosa's request, I was careful to spell out that any decision *not* to take part in the research would not mean withdrawing from lessons or the work done in them, just from the subsequent small-group discussions. However, I was keen to emphasise the intention that the discussions should provide a valuable opportunity for students to reflect on their reading, a view informed by my earlier research on young people's reading. Finally, separate consent forms were completed and signed by each student (Appendix 10: Student consent form) as I felt they also had the right to state whether or not to be involved in the research.

Out of the thirty-one students in the original Year 8 class, thirty readily agreed at the outset to participate in the project. It was a pleasing response, the autistic student mentioned earlier being the only one not to reply. Twenty-seven parent/carer consent forms were also returned with agreement that their children be involved. Of the remaining three forms not returned, one parent later effectively added his consent when he was interviewed by his son, agreeing to the data to be used as part of the project and thereby indicating support for his son's involvement. Another student only participated at the stage of interviewing an adult and obtained her grandmother's consent for the information to be used. The third willingly undertook all four activities and signed her own consent form but no parent/carer signature was obtained at any point so no data from her participation have been included.

It is possible that pressure from parents keen for the students to participate, combined with the fact they would be doing the tasks in English anyway, as well as their teacher's well-established enthusiasm for reading, might have made it difficult for the students to opt out. As Martyn Denscombe and Liz Aubrook conclude at the end of their investigation into students' perceptions of completing

research questionnaires in school, 'The vital point is not that pupils *are* free to say no but that they *feel* free to say no' (Denscombe and Aubrook, 1992, p. 130). Whilst the students in my study certainly were free to opt out, there was undeniably the potential for them not to have *felt* free to do so.

On the other hand, the apparently high level of willingness to be involved was perhaps not surprising, given the perceived implicit merit (within an educational, if not social, context) of being a committed reader. Furthermore, although some parents might have viewed classroom research as detracting from the main business of teaching, it was relatively commonplace at Cornford, in part because of the school's involvement with initial teacher education. In this case, too, the research topic – reading – and my interest in young people who do regularly and voluntarily read and who engage with a variety of texts for a range of purposes with the expectation that their reading will be pleasurable and interesting, appeared to present few problems. From a classroom teacher's perspective, as I know from my own past experience, there is nothing overtly controversial about it. Nevertheless, I was not the class teacher but a researcher. With the exception of one student whose parents I knew, I was not known to the group and was therefore not party to a wealth of potentially sensitive background information that as a teacher I obviously would have accumulated. For example, when contemplating questions to raise in the group discussions I spent a long time debating whether or not to ask the students about their parents' occupations. As a teacher I would almost certainly have known that information, but as a researcher I did not. Whether to ask or not presented a number of dilemmas. On the one hand, from my reading of Rose (2001) I was aware of how, in a historical context, knowing the trade or occupation of a reader or a reader's parents is often indicative of sociocultural background. It can also sometimes account for reading preferences, as appears to be the case in Fry's study with Clayton's father in whose home there are 'books about trains, farming, horses and wildflowers' (Fry, 1985, p. 22) and who, with his agricultural background, perhaps not surprisingly becomes interested in his son's reading of *Watership Down*. On the other hand, although I had not encountered problems in this respect before, it remained a potentially sensitive area; indeed, one of the reading journey collages offered a stark reminder of that fact, depicting as it did the death of Bekki's parents within the first four months of her life: two rounded gravestones with RIP on them in one

box and '4 months: Parents were killed' in the next. Interestingly, the nature of the activity had enabled Bekki to decide for herself whether or not to volunteer the information in her reading journey whereas being asked about her parents' occupation in the small-group interview could have placed her in an uncomfortable situation.

There was another reason, too, for not deliberately seeking information about parents' occupations, namely possibility of bias on my part as researcher if I were to make unsubstantiated assumptions about links between occupation and social class or tendency as a reader. The students in Denscombe and Aubrook's study certainly saw such potential for bias as a problem. The research topic of the questionnaire they had completed was drug abuse. 'Some pupils objected to the questionnaire because they felt the whole exercise was involved with labeling and stereotyping ... The questions relating to parents' work status were a focal point for much of this concern' (Denscombe and Aubrook, 1992, p. 119). Though curious, therefore, I desisted from seeking this information although some emerged unsolicited in the course of the research activities.

I anticipated two additional issues which would inevitably impinge on the project. The first was the question of who would respond to the work the students generated, and how. I was mindful that Rosa, like all English teachers, already had a very heavy marking load and I was anxious not to increase it, especially since she was devoting additional time to offering feedback on the design of the research tasks. Three of the four tasks would involve Rosa in extensive preparation and planning beyond the work we did together, for example planning the individual lessons and gathering resources. She was also keen, however, to share her planning and report back on the teaching so that I would be as fully aware as possible of the context within which students' ideas about reading were being generated. This involved yet further time commitment. Therefore, whatever means she used to accredit their work, we agreed I would also provide individual written responses to any students who chose to let me use their written-up parent interviews (Appendix 11: Example of interview response) and, as explained earlier, their reading journals. As the project developed, there was a danger the students might lose momentum and I did not want them to feel that when their work became data it lost its interest for me as a reader. Rosa told me the students

welcomed my feedback (Email correspondence 06.11.08); despite their appreciation, I did not sense it biased their subsequent contributions. It was certainly not sufficient to ensure that all students completed and returned their reading journals; from those who did, there was no sense that anything they wrote or drew was a direct result of the feedback I offered.

A second issue was that I did not wish to be indebted to the school in any way for materials and therefore provided resources for all three classroom-based tasks: supplementary materials for making collages; guidance booklets for the interviewing task and copies of exemplar interviews; guidance on ways to write a reading journal, copies of a short story to be used as a trial run for journal writing and exercise books for students to use as the journals themselves.

Participation and data selection

In the context of this study, I view the issue of participation as an ethical one. As I have outlined earlier, for pedagogical reasons the design of the research needed to involve activity which would as far as possible be intrinsically motivating for the students and perceived as valuable to them. I did not wish to use any methods not based on those aspirations. Therefore, an important underlying principle was to devise work which aimed to engage students and offer worthwhile opportunities for them to extend their learning about themselves as readers. However, this principle also presented problems for sampling. Unless the whole class formed the sample, how could a selection be made which did not potentially discriminate against the rest of the group, if being involved was intended to be beneficial to their learning and development? The solution appeared to lie in the notion that all students would participate in any work which was done as part of their English curriculum whether as classwork or homework but would then be free to decide whether or not they allowed me to use it for my research. Ethically, it seemed to be justifiable, but would potentially present other problems if a large proportion of the students opted to be involved in the research.

The number of students willing to be participants in the research throughout and the amount of data generated gives rise to another issue which might be perceived as an ethical one, namely selecting data for close analysis and discussion. The solution, which married with my stated aims to retain the distinctiveness of

individual reading trajectories in their contemporaneous co-existence with other people's, was deliberately to bring different data into focus at different times, sometimes individually, sometimes grouped, in order to begin to develop a rich and detailed picture of readers and their readership. It necessarily meant drawing on data that were relevant (a word whose etymology reminds us that it means raised up or in relief), knowing that what constituted relevance in itself would change over time and be affected by constant re-reading of the data overall.

Reliability and replicability

The way that issues of participation were resolved, I would argue, enhanced the reliability of the research, inasmuch as the concept of reliability is appropriate in a study such as this where many 'versions of the same reality co-exist because reality is multi-layered' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p. 120). Ensuring that the methods would not only generate rich data but that they were each developed from already well-established English pedagogy and practice not only contributed to the high rates of return across all four research methods, even the least popular, but also meant that there was always a likely fit between what were being generated as data and what was simultaneously being done in the name of English work. Although the replicability of the research remains to be tested in practice, responses to presentations and articles based on this work so far suggest a strong likelihood that that in comparable situations, teachers and researchers would generate equivalent data, albeit substantively distinctive. Because of the central involvement of families in the research, it is possible to foresee some social and cultural variation in the project's replicability, but initiating it from within the English classroom would arguably have a strong stabilising effect.

In the four chapters which follow, I turn my attention to the data analysis itself, structuring each chapter around one of the four research methods (collages, semi-structured small-group interviews, student interviews with parents and grandparents, reading journals) and one or more of the theoretical perspectives (social, cultural, spatial and historical), making connections between them as appropriate. The first of these four chapters, Chapter 5, begins with a brief overview of some of the analytical challenges posed by all the data I collected, the procedures I adopted for analysing them and the way the data analysis is organised.

5 READING JOURNEY COLLAGES: THE SPATIAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Analytical challenges

As I have already stated earlier in the thesis, the challenge of data analysis in this particular study was compounded by the fact that it was reading which was being researched, an activity which most of the time is neither visible nor tangible: I therefore needed to generate data in the form of a range of readers' accounts, the scope and nature of which, in turn, depended upon the efficacy of my chosen research methods. Furthermore, as already mentioned, I was working with between twenty-three and thirty young readers at any one time in the project, with data generated by their interviews with a further twenty-six adults beyond that.

The potential for this research to make an original contribution to the field to some extent lies in the ways in which the different strands of data have been analysed not only independently but also in their encounter with one another and, thereafter, the extent to which such analysis affords new constructions of young people as readers, their reading and readership. Although I viewed different data from different theoretical perspectives – the social, cultural, spatial and historical – the analysis overall was inter-related. I discuss in the final chapter of the thesis, what ideas have accrued as a result of adopting multiple viewpoints, considering whether such an approach changes the way young readers and reading are perceived and how their readership is described and interpreted. Meanwhile, the way data analysis is arranged in this chapter and the three which follow is firstly chronologically with data generated by the research activities presented in the order in which the tasks were carried out to provide a sense of how the evidence accumulated over time. Secondly, the data from each research method are analysed predominantly in the light of one or more of the four main theoretical perspectives listed above so as to bring each in turn clearly into view. Thirdly, as already stated, the discussion focuses on responses which proved the most salient and interesting from amongst the group as a whole. These three different aspects of the analysis – the research method, the theoretical perspective and the salient responses – have nevertheless been brought together by the trajectories of different students as their interrelationships with adjacent trajectories were

explored. Mike Crang, drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin, writes in similar terms about the very process of analysis itself. He comments that Benjamin:

... begins to suggest our analysis is crowded with materials, jostling together and he suggests we need to think about the multiple interrelationships of material, rather than seeing ideas emerging in some straightforward sequence from question, to field, to data, to written account (Crang, 2003, p. 122).

In adopting analytical approaches suited to the dynamics of the data and interconnections between them, I tried to retain what Geertz, describing ethnographical findings, calls their 'complex specificness, their circumstantiality' (Geertz, 1975, p. 23). Although Geertz is writing in the context of anthropology, his point about what the findings are *for* is relevant to this project with its explicitly educational intentions:

It is with [this] kind of material ... that the mega-concepts ... can be given the sort of sensible actuality that makes it possible to think not only realistically and concretely about them, but, what is more important, creatively and imaginatively with them (*ibid.*).

Analytical procedures

The analytical procedures I used were necessarily various: on the one hand, I attempted to reconstruct the rich social and cultural layering bespoken by the language of the data, in ways akin to Ryle's concept of thick description discussed earlier; on the other hand, because of the historical and spatial dimensions of the research, I aimed to trace and account for shifts and changes which then threatened to destabilise the layering. I therefore moved between linear, sequential reading of data generated by individual students; linguistic, textual and discourse analysis of data generated by individuals, pairs and groups; thematic coding across all the data sets. Whatever the analytical procedure, close critical re-reading of the data was the dominant approach. My aim was to be highly attentive to the multifarious ways in which language was being used, especially – given the social constructionist approach being adopted – 'language as social action with a focus on what members of a social group are accomplishing through their discourse, rather than focusing solely on language form or function' (Gee and Green, 1998, p. 122). I also assumed 'the language user is not a detached communicator, sending out and receiving information, but is always located, immersed in this

medium and struggling to take her or his own social and cultural positioning into account' (Taylor, 2001, p. 9). The concept of 'social and cultural positioning' resonates with the idea of *cultural models* proposed by Gee (1992). 'Cultural models are "story lines", families of connected images (like a mental movie), or (informal) "theories" shared by people belonging to specific social or cultural groups' (Gee and Green, 1998, p. 123). For the researcher interested in this theory, the task is:

... to construct representations of cultural models by studying people's actions across time and events ... the analyst asks questions about the patterns of practice that make visible what members need to know, produce, and interpret to participate in socially appropriate ways ... By means of such questions, the analyst can examine, for example, what members construct together, what they hold each other accountable to, and how they view the actions of others (*ibid.*, p. 125).

Since my research was concerned with integral relationships between language and the social and cultural aspects of reading, the exploration of how social and cultural positioning contributes to constructions of readers and readership clearly formed part of my analysis, too.

Furthermore, as already suggested, my approach needed to be able to account for the momentum of readers' trajectories. Pennycook (1994), although writing specifically in the context of applied linguistics, critiques versions of critical discourse analysis which present 'a problematically static view of both language and society [in which] there is little space for an understanding of human agency, interpretation or change' (*ibid.*, p. 126). Instead, he argues for a form of analysis which is 'not concerned with how discourses (texts) reflect social reality, but how discourses produce social realities' (*ibid.*, p. 130), an idea he develops further to include spatial as well as social interaction in more recent work (Pennycook, 2010). In the context of conducting classroom-based educational research and writing from a sociocultural perspective, Mercer has likewise drawn attention to the need for analytical tools which do justice to the complexity of what is often being enacted. 'Any specific interaction in which two people are engaged in solving a problem together,' he argues, 'has a *historical aspect* and a *dynamic aspect*' (Mercer, 2005, p. 140). Therefore, researchers need to record and analyse the language of different educational episodes over time as well as interpreting the interaction between participants during any single recorded event. Because my

research involved four different methods it was not for the most part possible to compare like with like over time; it was possible, though, to make connections between students' representations of themselves as readers at different points in the research, in particular to consider how their momentum gave shape to their trajectories. However, I needed procedures which involved detailed and close reading such as analysis of grammatical or figurative characteristics of language to be able to identify patterns within the data and trace interrelationships between trajectories. Crang (2003) describes Benjamin's reluctance to impose a linear structure on material that he saw as complex and multidirectional:

His response was that instead of building a linear argument, he would work through images of juxtaposition and collage that would alter the meaning of each fragment and that this procedure would make new truths erupt, and, he hoped, disrupt the status quo, from the conjunctures and disjunctures between elements (*ibid.*, p. 136).

My aim was that the analytical procedures I adopted would likewise result in conjunctures and disjunctures which might at least call into question the status quo, if not disrupt it.

Analysing reading journey collages from a spatial theoretical perspective

In this, the first of the four data analysis chapters, I return to Massey's concept of space, already discussed in Chapter 2, and analyse the first section of my data – the reading journey collages – primarily from the spatial theoretical perspective she explores in *For space* (Massey, 2005). Massey's argument is that space be seen as a sphere of being, constantly under construction, a meeting up of coeval trajectories each of which has an attendant historical dimension. Space is dynamic not static, multiple not singular, diachronic as well as synchronic. I use the term 'spatial', in the context of the analysis which follows, to include all those facets.

Rivers of reading

Using the idea of a river as a metaphor for personal reading journeys gives rise to certain expectations about concepts of reading and readership. Rivers are constantly in motion and ever-changing, shaped by and shaping the terrain through which they flow. From their source to their destination, they curve, rush, stagnate; their colour is formed by light from the changing skies above and the scope and substance of the depths below. In every respect, then, they are dynamic,

constantly shifting and restructuring themselves in endless combinations and reconfigurations of time and space. Whether students in this research project used the river analogy for their collages or a metaphor of their own choice, they needed to consider the space and time through which they had already moved as well as the current dynamics of their reading. Some students also cast their thoughts forward to anticipate their future direction as readers. The task therefore encourages a spatial representation of reading, that is to say a representation of the course of each student's reading over time *and* within spheres where it coincides with (or, following Massey, is coeval with), or even is *influenced* by, other courses such as those of family members, teachers, peers or texts. The representations integrate verbal and visual modes, each mode involving a different but complementary 'fundamental organisational principle or logic' as Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen suggest (2006, p. 40): the verbal aspects of the reading journey tend towards narrative, that is to say, to being organised temporally and sequentially whilst the visual aspects afford the opportunity for more relational and conceptual organisation. In sum, the characteristics of rivers and journeys associate strongly with sequential narratives, journals and timelines whilst the notion of mapping the terrain through which rivers progress offers a simultaneous opportunity for the spaces of reading to be represented more conceptually. The task thus marries well with Massey's spatial theoretical perspective. Nor is it at odds with other theoretical perspectives informing the research, even though they are not foregrounded in this chapter, for example Daniel Schwarz's notion of reading as an odyssey, 'the journey of the mind to understand a world beyond itself' (Schwarz, 2008, p. 1), Bakhtin's chronotope and, indeed, David Lodge's claim (after Bakhtin) that 'The novel is arguably man's most successful effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through space and time' (Lodge, 2002, p. 10).

The collages prompted students to make both visual design choices (shape, colour, layout, spatial relationships) and verbal choices (lexis, syntax, mode of address) and to represent their material creatively. Indeed, the variety of metaphors they adopted is evidence of the pleasure this class took in being idiosyncratic. The students were encouraged by prior activity with their teacher and the task itself to represent their reading over time, shaped by critical incidents. They were not, however, taught anything (on this occasion, anyway) either about

visual design or the multimodal affordances of collage. Had they been, it is quite likely that several of them would have enjoyed explicitly drawing on knowledge of vectors and the effects of different design choices in the process of depicting their ideas. Likewise, their attention was not drawn to ways in which the language of their collages might be interpreted. Again, had it been so, they might have made different decisions. I stress these points in order to acknowledge that each student's collage represents one of many possible ways they might have constructed their reading journeys. How the collages have been analysed and interpreted cannot therefore be construed in any way as definitive; however, they have broadened the opportunity for richly layered description compared with the minimal information afforded by the reading logs in which students hitherto recorded their reading as lists of dates, titles and authors.

Bekki's collage: fluctuating patterns

I have chosen to discuss seven of the collages here, selecting those which have particular salience from a spatial perspective identified through close analysis of the visual, verbal, substantive and conceptual choices students made in their construction. I begin with Bekki's 'My Life's Story Line', a wide fold-out collage with three layers: her title and some kisses along the top, a row of visual images underneath and a predominantly written elaboration along the bottom. The three strata converge at the end of the collage where pasted-on book covers of favourite books cascade across the page (Figure 5.1). Other than its left-to-right direction, there is little that is recognisable as a river; the prevailing structure is more suggestive of a timeline. The first three stages deal with Bekki's first eighteen months, including the tragedy which shaped her future trajectory (Figure 5.2):

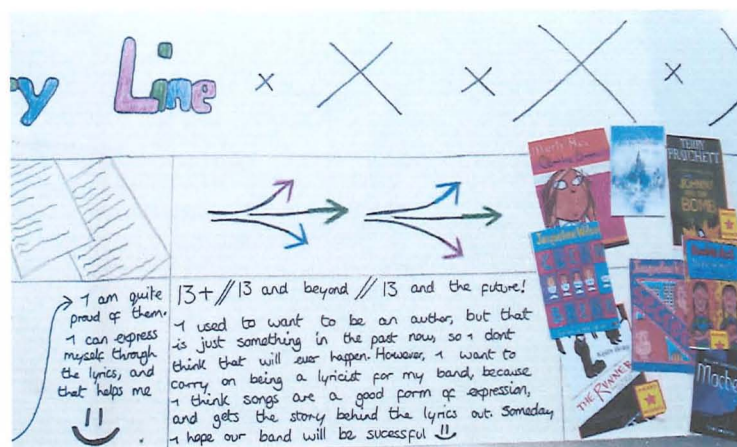


Figure 5.1

Detail from Bekki's collage

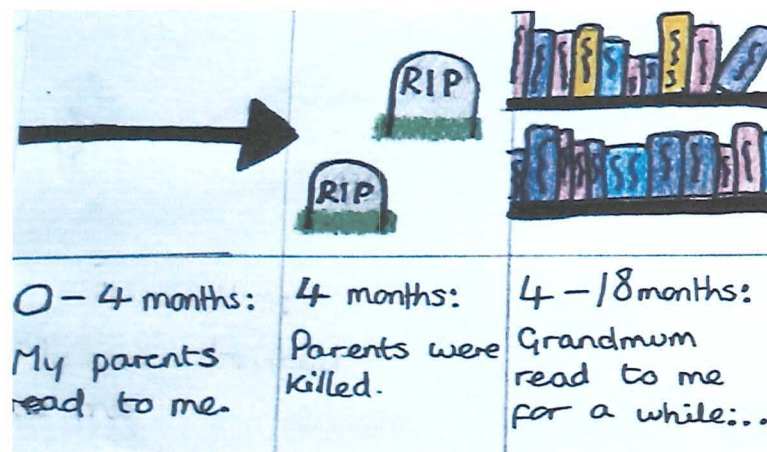


Figure 5.2 Detail from Bekki's collage

In the group interview Bekki introduced herself as living in a very small village quite some way from Cornford with her grandparents, her half brother, a dog and a lot of fish: 'My half brother he's just left [Cornford]. He's into bands and stuff'. During the course of the interview and later in her reading journal it was clear that Bekki was a keen reader, but her enthusiasm for writing, firstly stories and then song lyrics, was currently in the ascendant, as the following extract from her collage shows:

10-12 years:

I wrote my own stories about my life and teenage problems, after reading A LOT of Jacqueline Wilson books. Im not too keen on her anymore, but she was a start of inspiration.

12-13 years:

I stopped writing my own stories but started reading Malorie Blackman. I think she is a fantastic author. Instead of writing stories, I am a lyricist, and I write SONGS for the band I am in ... The songs are powerful, and I am quite proud of them. I can express myself through the lyrics and that helps me.

13+//13 and beyond//13 and the future!

I used to want to be an author, but that is just something in the past now, so I don't think that will ever happen. However, I want to carry on being a lyricist for my band, because I think songs are a good form of expression, and gets the story behind the lyrics out. Someday I hope our band will be successful.

Substantively, the collage fleshes out Bekki as a person in several ways: her family history; her sense of herself as a reader and a writer; her identity as a lyricist and the importance to her of being in a band (no longer in existence by the

time of Bekki's group interview with me!). An analysis of the visual and the verbal provides evidence of something more subtle: a fluctuating pattern in which favourite authors and different interests wax and wane. Bekki's intuitive awareness of the concept of change is evident in her balancing of vocabulary: 'I stopped writing my own stories but started reading Malorie Blackman'. A little further on she is more explicit, moving from past to present and marking the emphasis syntactically: 'Instead of writing stories, I am a lyricist'. In the final section of writing, the verbal representation of her trajectory is more complex still with a clear shift of perspective: 'I used to want to be an author, but that is just something in the past now, so I don't think that will ever happen'. What becomes pivotal is 'hope'. The combination of 'Someday' and 'hope' in the final sentence of the above extract, viewed in the light of past experiences to date, is represented slightly differently in the accompanying visual image: the tripartite arrow which simultaneously suggests forward movement but diverging possibilities, arguably a satisfactory positioning for any young person to adopt, and one which coincides with Massey's formulation of space as 'the product of interrelations ... always in the process of being made ... never finished; never closed' (Massey, 2005, p. 9).

Thomas's collage: changing and maturing

Thomas was another whose collage was open-ended and optimistic. Observing Thomas in the collage-making lesson, it was clear he was a lively, astute, sociable member of the class who seemed to enjoy talking about the task with his classmate, Luke, and the two students sitting in front of them one of whom was Bekki, the other her friend Abigail. When Thomas later introduced himself formally to me at the start of the group interview, he explained that he lived on an alternating basis with his mum in a village some way from the school and his dad in a nearby town. He foregrounded his interest in sport, specifically cricket and football. He added that he did a lot of cycling and that he belonged to two drama groups, one in his village, one in a nearby town, both of which put on shows of varying levels of professionalism. Thomas's collage (Figure 5.3) has a very faintly sketched outline of a river meandering across the centre of his sheet of paper. Beside it are clustered pictures of books he has read at various stages of his life. The pictures have been casually cut out from the book catalogues mentioned earlier and offer a glimpse of some of his preferences.

During my observation of the collage-making lesson I listened to him reminiscing about some of the early childhood reading which appears in his collage, for example Martin Waddell and Patrick Benson's *Owl Babies* which he liked although he said he used to find the owls scary. Thomas was a reader with considerable critical acumen, interested in articulating his distinctiveness rather than conforming to other people's assumptions. Here and elsewhere, he was willing to explore his reading preferences and dislikes, and – especially – to recognise that experiencing low points in reading, even stopping altogether at times, did not spell the end of his commitment. In his collage, Thomas's final question (which echoes Bekki's diverging arrows) is answered by the presumption that his reading will 'keep changing and maturing'. Evidence to support this likelihood is already present in the progress he has depicted from earliest enjoyment of picturebook anthropomorphism, magic and fantasy to a taste for more adult reading. Amongst his later favourites are J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and some popular spy fiction series.

Thomas's collage does not merely give us the *what* and the *when* of his reading; although brief, it has – like many of the others – trace elements of social activity and cultural values related to reading, developed over time i.e. a spatial dimension in keeping with Massey's conceptualisation. There is the routine of being read to every night by his parents; then reading 'a lot' in the later years of primary school. There is also his comment in scare-quotes that he has recently 'become more 'fussy', a word not only connoting Thomas's particularity about the content of books but also his developing critical skills which demand particular qualities of style and structure if reading is to be pleasurable, as was to become clearer in his subsequent contribution to the group interview and his reading journal.

Abigail's collage: reading companions

In the group interview, Abigail (Bekki's friend) told me she lived with her mum, dad, younger sister and dog in a very small village even more distant from Cornford than Thomas's. She and Thomas went to the same primary school. Like him, she had an assured presence which meant she was, for the most part, not inhibited talking about matters to do with reading although she did occasionally temper her comments with disclaimers such as when she was explaining her

extensive re-reading of the Harry Potter books and added that 'it sounds a bit rubbish 'cos no one reads them any more'. When referring to the school library her initial comment was characteristically enthusiastic: 'The library here's good. Yeah, it's got like loads of variety' but when I asked if she used it much she backtracked, claiming instead: 'I don't usually. Occasionally, if my friend needs a book or something I'll go in and look round for books with her', raising questions about whether or not she did in fact use the library regularly. For the most part, however, she spoke effusively, for example when explaining her interests: 'I'm really big on art at the moment, I love art, I've always loved it and I also love dance as well. I love dance'. The kind of dance she said she liked was 'a mixture between lyrical, contemporary and hip-hop', adding that she was 'big on music as well'. She told me that although she used to like writing stories in school, she now much preferred writing a blog:

I write to like ... get my point across, and let people know what I think ... I'm much more interested in reading what other people think ... and then writing my own ones ... I've always been kind of like quite assertive in a way ... if I don't like something then people know about it and everything, yeah – I'll say it. And I will say it in my blog. Like, OK, It can sometimes be taken as quite, um ... ['Offensive', suggests Bekki] ... No, not offensive, but like quite forward and um ... they'll read it and they'll think 'oh my god she's horrible' but ... I like just letting people know what goes on in my head, what's me.

Abigail's collage (Figure 5.4) was different from Thomas's. She chose to represent her journey as an aerial view of a steam train moving along a winding section of track, with numbered station posts along the route and the train's steam providing a frame for the title.

Positioned centrally in Abigail's collage are J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books, evidence of her continuing passion for them. Her interest began with her mother reading *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* to her and her younger sister, followed by her reading the rest independently. Towards the end of her journey she notes: 'I have read all the Harry Potter books that have been out and they have all added so much imagination and moved me on in reading'. In our later discussion Abigail said she was currently reading the sixth Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* for the third time in preparation for publication of the final book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, later that month. From what Abigail reports, it appears she has been keeping company with

Harry Potter from a very young age, reading and re-reading the books in a purposeful, systematic way, accruing what she calls ‘imagination’ through this engagement and making progress as a reader. As Victor Watson astutely notes in his scholarly work, *Reading series fiction*, ‘You cannot read a series of twelve novels by chance’ (Watson, 2000, p. 1). It is something we undertake knowingly.

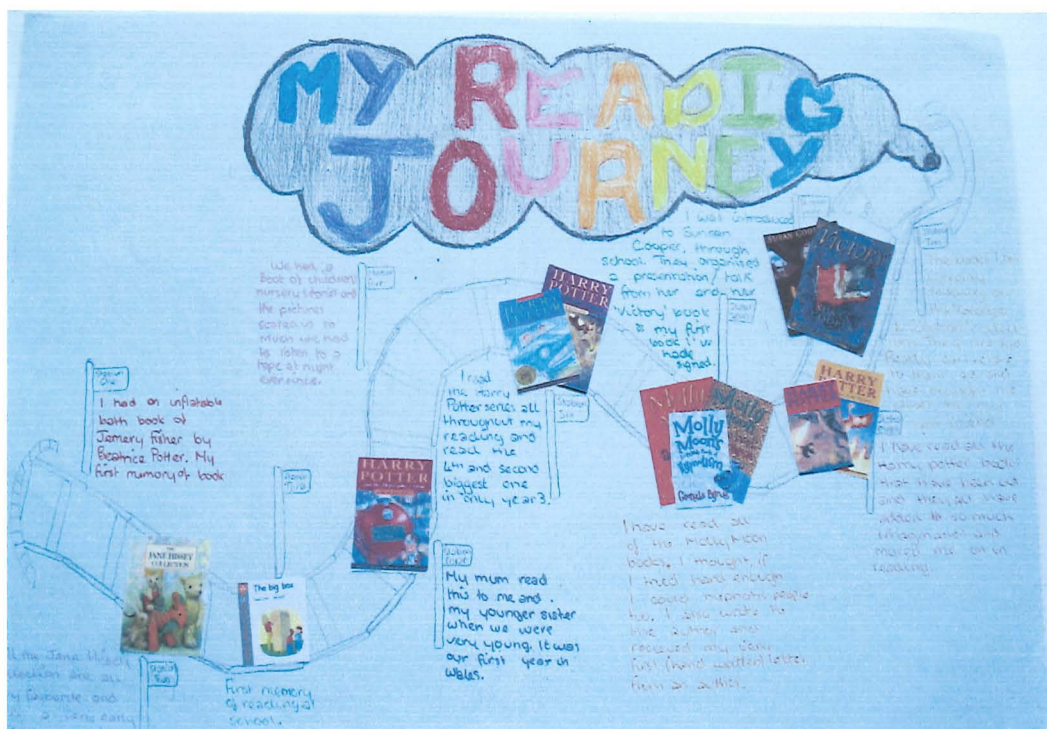


Figure 5.4 Abigail's collage

Furthermore, he argues that, contrary to popular belief, as readers we do not ‘grow out of series novels; we grow into them’ (*ibid.*, p. 7). Abigail herself recognises that reading different Harry Potter books has not merely meant reading more of the same; rather, the experience has extended her as a reader. There are, therefore, important points to be observed in spatial terms: whilst Abigail herself moves as a reader through time, she encounters characters who are, themselves, growing older within the fictional time-spaces – Bakhtin’s chronotopes – not just the chronotopes (and microchronotopes) within each novel but the overarching chronotope of the series as a whole. The Harry Potter books are long and take time to read. Choosing to re-read each involves layering the reading experiences, deepening the relationship with the text as a result: re-reading any novel can never be the same as on the previous occasion since the reader has changed irrevocably, not least because of the passage of time; earlier readings may be recalled, but never entirely replicated.

Analysed from a spatial perspective, one salient feature of Abigail's collage is the different spaces created by the companionship formed through reading, whether with fictional characters or people in her immediate life such as her mother and younger sister. She also makes an overt link between readership and friendship via Louise Rennison's Georgia Nicolson series:

The books I am currently reading are the "Georgia Nicholson" collection. They are fab. Really can relate to them and have brought me closer to my best friend.

She is particularly aware of authorship, twice choosing to mention authors she has made contact with, through a school visit (Susan Cooper) or corresponding with them (Georgia Byng). Abigail's trajectory overtly connects with others' in powerful social ways which are further elaborated when I discuss data generated by her through the other research activities.

Andie's collage: interweaving trajectories

Andie's collage (Figure 5.5) shares similarities with Abigail's but covers yet more ground and more complex time-spans.

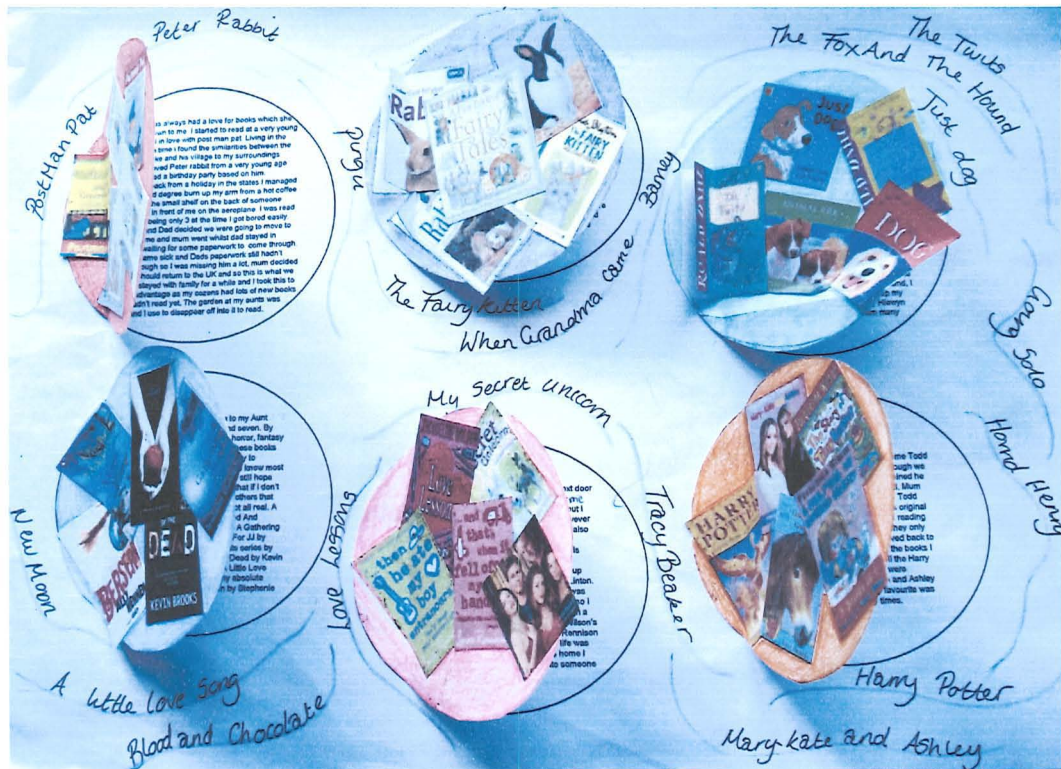


Figure 5.5 Andie's collage

It would have been tempting to cast Andie as not particularly self-assured, since in the group interview she herself claimed that was the case: 'I'm not actually that confident and everyone kind of thinks I am but like inside I'm not actually that confident'. However, the fact that she was prepared to admit this point in the presence of her peers, coupled with the detailed and thoughtful accounts she gave of herself as a reader in all the research tasks, suggests that in many ways she *was* a confident young person. She introduced herself in the group interview as an only child living with her mum and her dad. She cited horse-riding and dancing as two things she liked. Andie chose to represent her reading journey as a highly stylised river. Her collage has six portals each opening onto a written account of a different stage in her reading journey. Swirling round the edges, from left to right on the top row and back again underneath, are wavy blue lines and titles of selected books or series, the covers of which have been glued onto each opening flap. Her lengthy autobiographical commentary – at over a thousand words it is more than twice as long as the wording on anyone else's collage – charts her reading journey as a series of specific critical incidents: accidents, illness, house moves; parental decisions to move abroad later being revoked; acquiring a much longed-for dog and then having to give him up. Descriptions of these incidents are interspersed with accounts of different states of emotion – boredom, loneliness, excitement, heartbreak – along with an awareness of the steadying influence of reading throughout. During the process of one upheaval 'Mum made sure that my favourite books were kept out so I still got to read them whilst we were on the move'.

The visual elements of Andie's collage are strongly shaped by the clusters of different texts she recalls having read and it is easy to see at a glance the preferences she identifies at different stages of her journey for example the shift from animal books to teenage diaries, or the later transition from light romance to darker gritty realism or fantasy, visible also in the change between the pinks and pale greens of the penultimate portal to the dark blues and black of the final one. Analysing what she has written, however, brings into focus a much more subtle depiction of her trajectory, arguably illustrating Massey's notion of space as 'a simultaneity-of-stories so far' (Massey, 2005, p. 9) as clearly as any of the other collages submitted. Here, the verbal mode very obviously extends beyond the

visual. Andie's account begins by situating her own trajectory in a matrix with two very different others, one real, one fictional:

My Mum always had a love for books which she has past down to me.
I started to read at a very young age and fell in love with post man pat.
Living in the North at the time I found the similarities between the
way he spoke and his village to my surroundings exciting.

The first trajectory is her mother's whose commitment to books is stressed by Andie's use of the term 'always' and her representation of it as a gift or inheritance to be passed on through the generations. It is interesting to note that when Andie's mother, Maria, was later asked by Andie in her interview who she thought had influenced *her* as a reader when she was a child, Maria said that no one in particular had; she had discovered things for herself. Maria's reading trajectory with its own particular history, however, has been aligned with Andie's for as long as her daughter can remember. It is important enough to provide the opening of her description. Then Andie mentions a childhood favourite with his own powerful trajectory: Postman Pat. She uses the exuberant phrase 'fell in love with' to depict the relationship she felt she had with this fictional character, developed first in television animation and later in books along with other artefacts such as toys and clothing. Although she does not specify where in the north of England she lived at the time, it is telling that she remembers identifying with Postman Pat's Lakeland-based village, Greendale, and his accent, both of which she says were like hers. In similar vein, she mentions another Lakeland character, Peter Rabbit, and a themed birthday party based on him, suggesting of course the powerful influence of an even longer-lasting franchise, initiated by Beatrix Potter herself at the beginning of the twentieth century. The reading network Andie establishes thus appears to be simultaneously constructed from the trajectories of other people who are important to her, as well as fictional characters and settings.

Although Andie clearly views certain adults' involvement in her early reading as crucial, it is not straightforward: her mother was in hospital for a while; her father worked away from home a lot though still tried to find time to read her a bedtime story – often Enid Blyton books. Andie spent a lot of time with a woman she calls Aunt Meg who, she says, 'I could never live without'. Her mother's leaving

hospital was shortly followed by another blow, the 'terrible' news that her grandmother had died. For a while after that:

... everyday I read a poem or story from the Book of Fairy Tales that she had brought just a few days before I got the news. I also enjoyed a book that we had just got in America called *When Grandma Came* by Jill Paton Walsh and Sophy Williams.

Reading and books here seem to form another legacy, this time between grandparent and grandchild, a way of continuing a relationship beyond the here-and-now.

For many young people, especially perhaps those such as Andie living in rural areas, encounters with animals often form critical incidents in their lives. With Andie, her reading forms a close bond between real and fictional animals. Her account of this series of stages in her journey begins shortly after one of their many house moves:

... we got my rabbit whose name was Flopsy I often read stories to her and this is when my animal crazy faze started.

When I moved up to [junior school] I also started to appreciate Roald Dahl books although I carried on with my love for animal books ... My favourite animal had always been a dog, I was forever pretending to be one and finally on my Mums birthday my Dad agreed we could get one. I was so excited and read every book I could get my hands on about them, when Todd came I spent as much time as I could with him we named him after my favourite Disney character Todd from the fox and the hound I often read to him while he was falling to sleep my favourite was the story called *Just Dog* by Haiwyn Oram and Lisa Flather and I read it to him many times.

As both my parents worked in the day time Todd was left on his own he hated it and although we brought him a kennel to go in when it rained he never used it so just got soaked instead. Mum decided it wasn't fair on us to keep Todd anymore and so he was returned to his original owner, I was heartbroken and stopped reading the books I read to him because they only reminded me of when he left.

Here the passing of time is measured as her trajectory runs for a while alongside those of her much-loved pets. Rabbit and dog are almost human companions to her, but real animals offer no resistance (albeit no response either) to a young reader's decision to exert on them her own choice of book to read aloud.

Whilst most of Andie's collage focuses on the critical incidents which have shaped her reading journey thus far, in the final stage she adopts a broader prospect, as if her somewhat turbulent river steadies as it nears the open sea and she can look about her with greater ease. She moves first into the present progressive tense:

Now believe it or not I am reading to my Aunt Meg's three children who are four, five and seven.

The present progressive, according to Ron Carter and Michael McCarthy, represents time 'in terms of its unfolding at the moment of speaking, and observes actions and events from within, as ongoing, in progress' (Carter and McCarthy, 2006, p. 604). Andie therefore brings her journey up to date without suggesting it is at an end. However, her exclamation 'believe it or not' appears to express surprise at this current state of affairs as well as an implied sense of what it indicates of the passing of time: the experience is clearly something of an advance on reading to one's pets, not least because whilst she presumably gains pleasure from reading to the three children, she no doubt experiences responsiveness and perhaps even resistance from these young readers from time to time.

In the next few sentences she adopts the present simple tense which 'sees time in terms of facts, truths, generalities and permanent states of affairs' (*ibid.*):

By myself I mostly read thrillers, sci-fi, horror, fantasy and some true life stories, I love all these books because it distracts me, takes me away to somewhere else and even though you know most of it is never going to happen there is still hope and possibilities. The stories tell me that if I don't feel like I am fitting in then there are others that feel the same way even if they are not all real.

Thomas was explicit about his future prospect as a reader; Andie's habituation to reading is implied, grammatically layered within her rationale for ongoing commitment. Her reading continues to bring her into contact with others whose identities she can relate to. But we should be careful to note that Andie recognises them as fictional others. She is not under any illusion about the boundaries between reality and realism: the narratives *attract* her to them precisely by the power they have to *distract* her from the everyday, to make it seem as if she is being transported to somewhere else 'even though you know most of it is never going to happen'. What her reading opens up for her are vantage points from

which to contemplate her own life and which, as Bekki's do for her, afford 'hope and possibilities'.

Andie finally lists some of her all-time favourite books by means of which she has navigated her journey so far. *Blood and Chocolate* by Annette Curtis Klause and Stephanie Meyer's Twilight series enable her to hypothesise about relationships between humans and vampires or werewolves. She enjoys murder mystery stories and social realism of various kinds such as *A Gathering Light* by Jennifer Donnelly, Anne Cassidy's *Looking for JJ* and *The Road of the Dead* by Kevin Brooks. Helen Dunmore's Ingo series draws on traditional Selkie folktales for its theme of two young people moving between the human and the mer-world. Meanwhile, Michelle Magorian's *A Little Love Song* takes the second world war as its setting and the position of women in particular as its theme. Her collage therefore depicts her as a habitual, committed reader, sufficiently confident to undertake a variety of reading challenges and playing an active part in shaping her own trajectory.

Freya's collage: passing time

Freya appeared slightly more reticent than her friends in the group interview but responded conscientiously to questions and follow-up prompts to give an interesting account of herself as a reader. She was very forthcoming, however, in her collage and, as can be seen in Chapter 8, in her journal. Although she said she liked doing art – abstract art in particular – this interest was not referred to any further in discussion whereas interests she had identified in connection with her reading – shopping and making cakes, for example – did become a later talking point. Moreover, in the bottom left-hand corner of her collage (Figure 5.6) there is a report of an incident – related to reading but not connected by any labelling to her reading journey – in which she was proud to have a poem published but disappointed that a friend who copied her ideas almost to the letter, also had her poem published in the same anthology. This little anecdote is telling in terms of Freya's feelings about composition, authorship and publication, amplifying a later comment she made in the group interview about enjoying writing poetry though not really showing it to anyone.

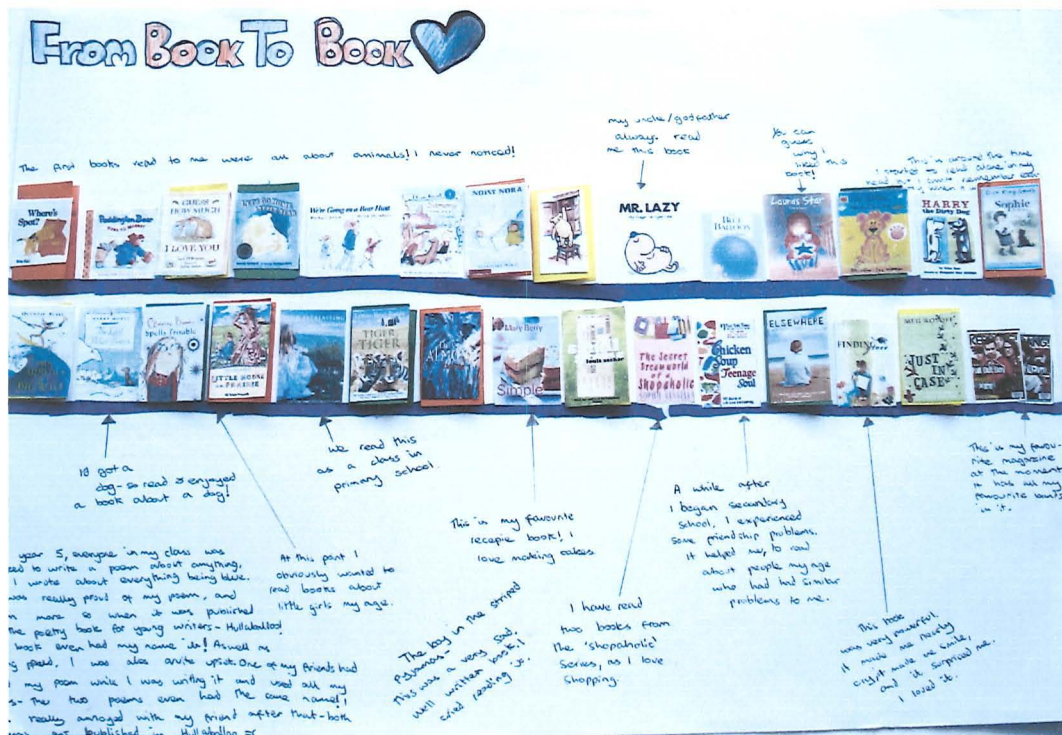
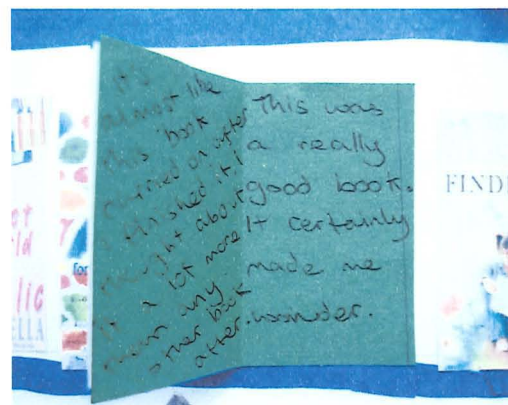


Figure 5.6 Freya's collage

Freya's collage, entitled 'From Book To Book ♥', features a highly stylised river in the form of two parallel blue lines, one above the other like a bookshelf. Cut-out pictures of the covers of books are pasted onto the sheet of paper, facing outwards above the line and labelled. Some of these are mounted on a small piece of coloured paper, folded in half so they open like a book. Inside are further written comments about that particular book (Figures 5.7 and 5.8).



Figures 5.7 and 5.8 Details from Freya's collage

Freya's collage begins with a note of surprise at something the task has revealed to her: 'The first books read to me were all about animals! I never noticed!'. With

this comment she also establishes a strong sense of time marking the progression in her journey. The passage of time is expressed in phrases such as 'When I was younger', 'This is around the time I started to read alone in my head, but I can't remember exactly when it was' or 'A while after I began secondary school'. Inscribed in many of her comments is also the notion of certain reading practices as habitual: of Roger Hargreaves' *Mr Lazy* she writes, 'My uncle/godfather always read this book to me'; as for *Noisy Nora* by Rosemary Wells, she remembers, 'I used to love this book being read to me'. The phrase 'used to' expresses, like the word 'always', a habitual state of affairs; but it also conveys the sense of its now being in the past, thus contributing to Freya's strong sense of growing and maturing as a reader. Her awareness is more overtly expressed elsewhere as when she remembers enjoying Dick King-Smith's *Sophie in the Saddle* and *Sophie's Lucky*: 'By the time I had realised there were other books in the series I was too old to read them!'

Another more explicit way in which Freya's collage conveys the complexity of the timescales involved in reading is in her reference to *Elsewhere* by Gabrielle Zevin. *Elsewhere* is a rather disturbing book about a sixteen year-old girl who, having been killed in a traffic accident, finds herself in an afterlife, a space in which time is reversed so its inhabitants are getting younger. 'This was a really good book. It certainly made me wonder,' writes Freya. 'It's almost like this book carried on after I finished it. I thought about it a lot more than any other book.' In addition, then, to inhabiting the strange time-frames crafted by Zevin within the novel whilst actually reading it, Freya experiences the way powerful texts like this linger, themselves acquiring a kind of afterlife beyond the physical bounds of the reading and the book.

Unlike most other people in the class, Freya included a number of non-fiction texts in her collage. Some of these are specifically linked with critical incidents at particular points in time, for example Jack Canfield *et al*'s *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul: 101 stories of life, love and learning* which is designed as a companion ('like a good friend' it says in the blurb) and served just that purpose for Freya. 'A while after I began secondary school, I experienced some friendship problems. It helped me, to read about people my age who had similar problems to me.' Books in Sophie Kinsella's Shopaholic series reflect Freya's enjoyment of

shopping (not, it should be remembered, an everyday occurrence for young people like Freya who lives fifteen miles from the nearest major urban centre with just one bus there and back a day taking over an hour each way). Mary Berry's *Simple Cakes* conveys her pleasure in cooking: 'This is my favourite recepie book! I love making cakes'. Her comment on the magazine *Kerrang!* locates her firmly in the present, qualifying the fact that it is her favourite with the words 'at the moment'. At this point her collage finishes, but 'at the moment' implies the likelihood of future change rather than an ending. Although the design of Freya's collage is predominantly linear, her comments on each book flesh out her experiences of reading them. 'From book to book ♥' is not just a route map; it incorporates features of emotional response as well. *Finding Grace* by Alyssa Brugman 'was very powerful. It made me nearly cry, it made me smile, and it surprised me. I loved it'. Similarly, John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* – this was a very sad, well written book. I cried reading it'. The spaces of her reading are constructed as much from texts as other readers. She weaves her readership from both the real and the imagined, enjoying the links she thereby makes between her lived life and her fictional experiences.

Perhaps because of the variety of reading she includes and her sharply focused comments on the texts, her collage gave rise to more discussion points in the group interviews than other people's, at times affording valuable links with data generated elsewhere in the research, as the following instance demonstrates. She and the other three girls in her interview group – Lily, Floella and Zara – were all friends, had all been to the same primary school and spent a great deal of time out of school together. At one point in the discussion I asked Freya to say a bit more about Mary Berry's *Simple Cakes*. She merely repeated that she enjoyed making cakes. However, the conversation then took a slightly different turn:

GCH: Does anyone else cook or use recipe books or any other kind of books for

Lily: Yeah, me and Floella, we've made kind of like cooking videos

GCH: You make – sorry – you make cooking videos?

Lily: Yeah [*inaudible*] a camcorder and

GCH: I'd like to see those

Floella: We made a giant cookie. We made a big video

GCH: What, like TV chefs?

Floella: Yeah.

Lily: Like 'Today, on our show...'

Floella: We usually make really weird things when we cook, like a cake that was like an igloo because we were doing a History project about Innuits so we did a cake that was like an igloo, yeah and we

Lily: Icing, seals and stuff

GCH: And did you video that as well?

Floella: No, we didn't video that

GCH: But you brought it in

Lily: Yeah.

GCH: What did they say, the History teacher?

Lily & Floella: Really good

Later in the interview, in the context of all four girls telling me about their respective websites and amidst much laughter, Lily and Floella spoke about other spoof films they had made together, for example one based on *Snakes on a Plane* which involved using scarves and long cardboard tubes from wrapping paper packs. Zara, the fourth member of the group said she enjoyed making little animation films using plasticine models. These fragments of conversation, prompted by discussion about reading, are unlooked-for evidence of the girls' playfulness and imagination, both qualities recognised as important in the early years of reading, but often overlooked in older readers like these. They correspond directly with Margaret Mackey's strong argument for the verb 'to play' to be used in connection with reading both within and across a range of texts in different media, including printed book texts:

Compared to the relatively passive activity of *receiving*, *playing* is a word that makes much more room for the agency and energy of performers. The idea of playing has a further virtue for this purpose, in that it calls for both internal and external accommodation to the activity: to play involves a commitment of the mind as well as appropriate behaviour of the body, a fruitful concept for considering the activities of text processing (Mackey, 2007, p. 172).

There is a further interesting reason for attending to the way these students use technology in the leisure pursuits they enjoy. It appears to enhance but not, as adults often assume, supersede the games they play. As with their references to websites, and Abigail's earlier explanation of why she likes blogging, the point seems to be that they use it as a medium for pursuing their interests, as one way amongst many of making meaning creatively and effectively, but not the only way.

Lily's collage: sharing stories

From the outset, Lily appeared very comfortable in the group interview. She shared her ideas and information about herself as a reader with ease and generosity. Like her three companions, she was a keen reader and punctuated her critical comments with plot summaries and views about different genres. Lily's collage design is different again from others in the class (Figure 5.9).

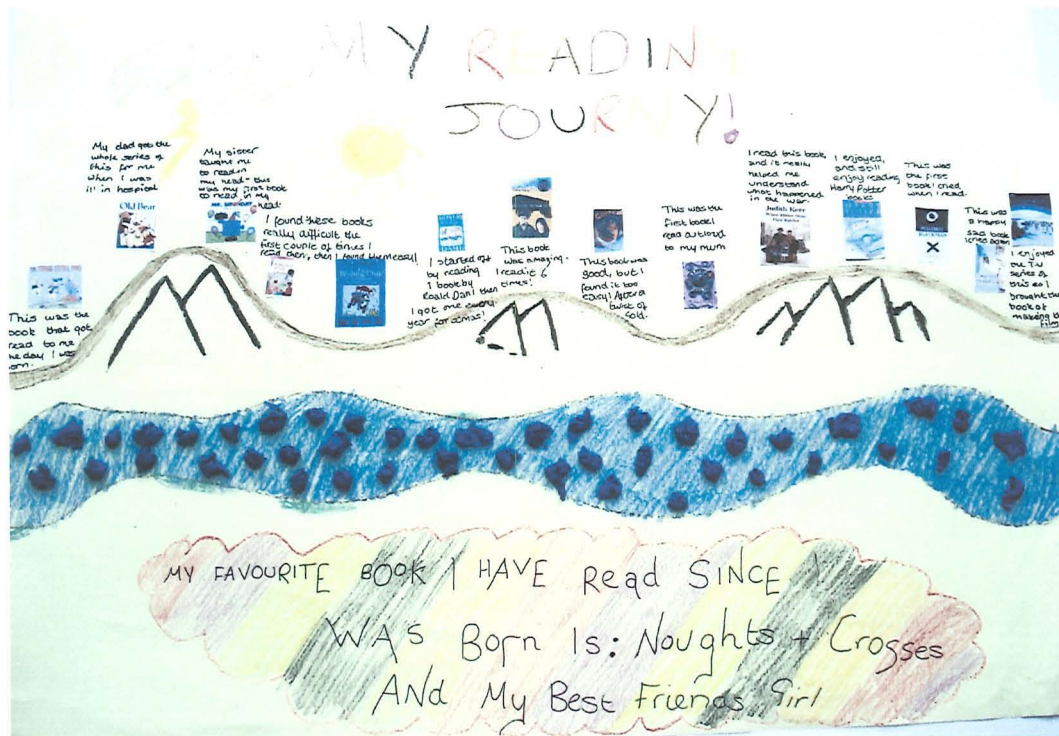


Figure 5.9 Lily's collage

It has some elements of a pictorial map, notably mountains drawn in and different representations of the weather such as sunshine to mark a break-through with reading in her head and thunderclouds with lightning over the section where she

had to be in hospital. For the most part, her collage records very positive memories with family members featuring actively. The journey progresses from left to right across the paper beginning with what she was read on the day she was born, information presumably gleaned from the preparatory homework for the task. Her father is cited early on as buying Jane Hissey's Old Bear series for her when she was ill in hospital, whilst her older sister is credited with teaching her to read in her head, a book in Hargreaves' Mr Men series being the first with which she succeeded in doing so.

Her mother features much later in the journey when it seems clear that Lily is already a habitual and committed reader. Lily has thus far charted her journey in terms of ease and difficulty of reading material and noted that with a favourite book like Michael Morpurgo's *Twist of Gold* she is keen enough to read it no less than six times. It therefore seems strange to mention only now that Michael Molloy's *The Time Witches* was 'the first book I read out loud to my mum'. Since it is an illustrated chapter novel, Lily seems rather old and too experienced a reader to be reading aloud to her mother for the first time. The issue, however, was clarified later in the group interview when we were discussing who, if anyone, they tended to talk with about their reading.

Lily: Well, I sometimes talk to my mum, 'cos I sometimes read to her like out loud at night.

GCH: Do you? Is that because you want her to hear the story?

Lily: Yeah. She sometimes asks me to do it so she can hear what's happening next.

GCH: Right. Does she like the horror books as well?

Lily: She's not as keen on them, as, like I read the Malorie Blackmans to her and she liked them.

GCH: So does she just sit and listen, or does she do something else while you're reading?

Lily: It's usually when she's cooking or something like that

GCH: Very nice to have your own personal reader, while you're cooking [*laughter*]

In Chapter 7, I discuss in greater depth the complex issue of reciprocity between children's and their parents' reading. If young children are read aloud to by their parents, as most in this class (and their parents before them) were, old and young both acquire a shared knowledge of books and often, due to repeated readings, know the texts by heart. Familiar characters, settings, sayings, actions become not just talking points but funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti, 2005) to be drawn on later, and common knowledge (Edwards and Mercer, 1987) or shared understanding developed jointly between adult and child. When children start reading independently it may cease to be a topic of conversation between parent and child. Unusually, however, Lily was continuing to read aloud to her mother for their mutual enjoyment of the story. The potential for shared talk and extended understanding was thereby sustained.

Whilst Lily's collage has similar features to Freya's (for example the way in which certain books trigger laughter or tears), and reflects Abigail's in her past and present passion for Harry Potter, it is distinctive in other respects. A particular feature is her efferent reading of certain books for their historical content. Above a picture of Judith Kerr's *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* Lily writes, 'I read this book, and it really helped me understand what happened in the war': through fictional representations of the past, Lily has learnt about historical past time. In the case of *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, Kerr is drawing on her own firsthand experience of growing up in a Jewish family in Germany during the rise of Nazism in the 1930s. As Lily reads the novel, she is therefore drawn alongside the fictional heroine, Anna, and – though perhaps a more shadowy figure – the author, Judith Kerr, gauging some aspects of her personal history via the semi-autobiographical text. It might also be inferred that reading *Twist of Gold* as many times as she did will have developed particular knowledge of aspects of the Irish potato famine and its human consequences, including the flight to America of many thousands of impoverished people.

Feeling the need, like Andie, to round off her collage with a longer view of her journey, Lily uses the space beneath the river to summarise. In a cloud coloured in mauve, brown, cream and black diagonal stripes, she announces that the favourite book she has read since she was born is Malorie Blackman's *Noughts and Crosses*, a book she has already said was her first experience of crying as a result

of reading. However, it should be noted (Figure 5.10) that Lily squeezes an addition under *Noughts and Crosses* – Dorothy Koomson’s *My Best Friend’s Girl* – rendering her summary ungrammatical and serving as a salutary warning against bringing any closure to these reading journeys: for habitual and committed readers, the position of favourite may be superseded at any time.

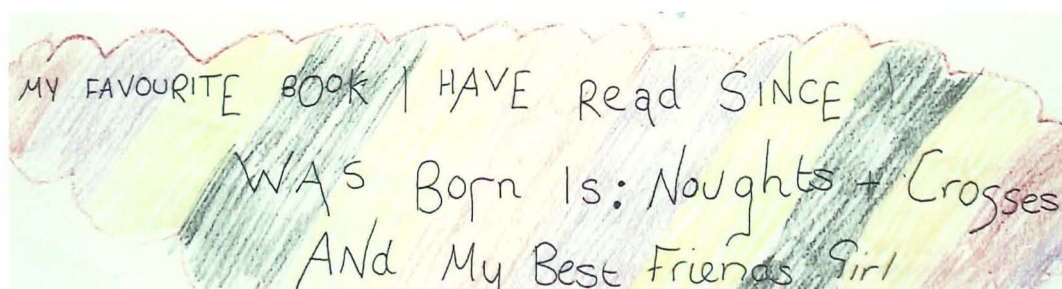


Figure 5.10 Detail of Lily's collage

Nathan's drawing: cataloguing reading

All the collages analysed so far, with their interesting sense of the time-space dimensions of reading, are in stark contrast with the last one I will discuss in this chapter: Nathan's (Figure 5.11).



Figure 5.11 Nathan's drawing

Nathan was a lively, forthcoming boy, who chatted with me and the other group members as we trekked from the English classroom over to the library for our group interview. He sat next to me on my left and remained focused, alert and willing to contribute throughout the discussion. He was the first to volunteer to introduce himself, telling me that he lived in a small village six miles from Cornford and that his hobbies were 'tennis and stuff'. When I asked what he did in the winter, he quipped 'snowball fights'. The way the others in the group responded suggests that they knew him as something of a comedian and enjoyed his jokiness.

In the collage-making activity, Nathan was the only student in the class not to represent his reading in terms of critical incidents. Instead, he drew a cartoon of himself surrounded by lists of many of his favourite books. A stuck-on picture of *Skellig*, with no label other than the title, is his only gesture towards a collage. The picture is dominated by a lively representation of Nathan which fills the centre of the piece of blue sugar paper. He looks out animatedly towards the viewer, mouth wide open as if talking. He wears a striking diagonally-striped top and an impish figure lurks in his hair. Beside him is a teetering pile of books. He clutches one in his raised left hand, his fingers partially obscuring its made-up title. A plaque saying 'all the Books ive read' is balanced on top. Sitting precariously on the edge of it is an apprehensive-looking figure clutching what looks like a rifle with a question mark floating above his head. He is looking towards the 'Action/spy' corner of the paper where another figure looks back and points forward in a Janus-like gesture. A label alongside it suggests that Nathan has read most of Anthony Horowitz's Alex Rider series. In the bottom right hand corner are two characters, one wearing military style clothing, the other peering out from beneath some camouflage, who illustrate the heading 'Adventure'. Here Nathan lists Horowitz's *Raven's Gate*, *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster and Michelle Paver's *Spirit Walker* as favourite reads. In the bottom left hand corner, a pair of raised hands with added motion blur applaud the words 'Top 10'. Paul Stewart and Chris Riddell's *The Edge Chronicles* series tops the list and the three novels from Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy also make an appearance. Finally, in the top left hand corner is the title 'Fantasy' with two wizard-like characters, one excited the other more sombre, underneath whom 'the entire edge chronicles!' is highlighted along with *The Phantom Tollbooth* again. The circle is complete.

The drawing represents Nathan's individual preferences and conveys his enthusiasm for reading. (It also suggests the pleasure Nathan must have taken in Chris Riddell's wonderfully detailed, dynamic and prolific line drawings in *The Edge Chronicles*.) However, the picture is uninformative in terms of time-space dimensions. Moreover, unlike many of the other collages which explicitly mention reading with other people – parents, uncles and aunts, cousins, brothers and sisters – Nathan's collage provides no inkling of any such interaction. It is entirely text focused. When it is read in conjunction with other data, especially from the small-group interview in which he participated, it makes a more significant contribution than is at first apparent, not simply as a catalogue of favourite books but as material through which reading relationships between him and other people are forged as well.

The wider value of reading journey collages

The benefit of using the collage-making activity as a research method was ultimately not the identification of habitual and committed readers within the group, but the way it prompted students to think about themselves as readers leading to the generation of rich visual and verbal data across the wider study in pursuit of deeper understanding about young readers. Although the rivers of reading activity has already been adapted within the context of work on building communities of readers in the 'Primary Teachers as Readers' research project (Cremin *et al.*, 2008) where it has been used successfully to encourage talk and thinking about reading with children as young as seven years old (Winchester, 2008) as well as with students on an undergraduate English Education course (Kelly, 2009), it has not been used for reading research *per se* and as such the findings from the method as it was used here make an original contribution to the way such research may be carried out and to the way young readers may be constructed by those who work with them in educational contexts.

It is possible to argue that the collages be viewed as 'a simultaneity of stories-so-far' (Massey, 2005, p. 9) a different way of conceptualising the variety of students' reading over time and its conjunction with other people's, one which emphasises change, difference, multiplicity and future transformation rather than more familiar essentialist categories into which young readers are often squeezed. As can be seen from the small number of collages referred to here, there are

considerable differences between them, even though the students who made them have been grouped by achievement as English students into a single class. There are also patterns of similarity, notably fluctuations of interest and changing preferences over time. The collages therefore offer indications of the nature of the spaces within which students' readership is variously shaped, in particular through social interaction. It is the social perspective, at times intersecting with the cultural, which is the focus of attention in Chapter 6.

6 SEMI-STRUCTURED GROUP INTERVIEWS: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Analysing the data from social and cultural theoretical perspectives

In this chapter, the focus is the second area of my research, namely the data arising from the semi-structured group interviews, viewed from both social and cultural theoretical perspectives. However, I also make connections with students' collages and their later interviews with parents and grandparents although the latter are examined in greater depth in Chapter 7.

There are two key ways in which the social aspects of this analysis are brought into focus. Firstly, I explore some of the social interactions in which young people may be involved as readers. For example, I examine evidence from the small-group interviews of communication between students about reading, peer support for each other as readers, reciprocal reading between adults and children and how students make connections between the world of their reading and the worlds in which they live, whether for contemplation or action.

Secondly, I attend to the fact that the interviews themselves are an immediate experience of social interaction in which concepts of readers, reading and readership are brought into being through language. As Vygotsky observed, 'Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them' (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 218). I therefore examine how talking together leads to thinking together about reading, looking for evidence in the discussions which extends rather than reiterates already known information. I draw once again on the work of Mercer to see whether his notions of 'exploratory', 'cumulative' or 'disputational' talk are helpful in analysing what emerges (2005). In Dewey's terms, in order for a relationship between people to be genuinely social, there needs to be communication (Dewey, 1916) by which he means something akin to Mercer's notion of the exploratory: for communication to be social rather than merely routine, meanings must be made and hence learning must occur as participants work actively towards joint construction of understanding.

Finally, in this chapter, I also explore how the interviews provide an opportunity for students to engage with some of the cultural values they have variously

acquired in relation to reading. I analyse selected data using the notion of cultural models to discuss how social and cultural positioning may also affect students' perceptions of reading and readership.

Transcription conventions

I have drawn on transcription conventions from the Phonology of Contemporary English project (Phonology of Contemporary English, 2009) to represent discourse from the group discussion (Appendix 12: Transcription conventions). I was particularly interested in moments when speakers might have been thinking something for the first time as a direct result of being in discussion with others. Where hesitations and gap-fillers such as 'like' and 'sort of' in the transcriptions appear to indicate such moments I have included them; elsewhere, I have omitted them.

Talking about reading

The first group I interviewed included Charlie and Elizabeth, joint winners of the school's Readathon that year. They were joined by Steve, Charlie's friend, and Jade who had been at the same school as Charlie before transferring to Cornford. Elizabeth's contributions appear surprisingly brief. She answers questions when asked but seldom extends a point. However, she is sometimes sharp, as the following short extract reveals. She had been asked by me whether the others in the group might like *Killers of the Dawn*, the ninth book in a series by Darren Shan which she had enjoyed.

GCH: Do you think they'd enjoy Darren Shan? [*Elizabeth nods silently*] Because?

Steve: Is he based on teenagers or for teenagers?

Elizabeth: Yeah.

Charlie: What sort of book is it? Is it like fantasy?

Elizabeth: It's kind of like ...

Jade: Is it for like all kind of ... girls and boys ... or is it more of a girly book?

Elizabeth: It depends if you're a girly girl or not [*laughter*].

I had to wait until I read her reading journal to learn more about the avid reader she was although there was plenty of implicit evidence of her commitment in her mother's interview responses. Charlie, on the other hand, seems to be more forthcoming. His contributions to the discussion reveal him to be a very keen though, as my analysis suggests, not always particularly sophisticated reader in terms of his readiness to adopt a critical stance towards what he reads. 'If I pick up a book I'm really absorbed in,' he explains, 'I just don't put it down. I just read and read and read until I have to and then just read and read and read again'. Several of the points he makes illuminate interestingly the social dimension of the research. Charlie had introduced himself as keen on sport including skiing, rugby and cricket. Like several of the other students in the class he says he enjoys being outside in the open: 'I'm not one of those people who sit indoors. I'd rather be outdoors'. He lists a number of countries where he has been skiing including 'Austria, France, Switzerland, America. We just go all sorts'. In addition to sport, another pastime is army cadets which he and Steve both enjoy. He takes an interest in the news and reads the papers his family take – the *Daily Mail* and the *News of the World* on Sundays.

He is at pains to explain why he thinks he is a more advanced reader than others in the class: he started reading at the private school he attended at the age of three and from then onwards always felt he was a step ahead of his peers. On the subject of being set reading homework he says, 'I write it down, but I just tick it off straight away 'cos I know I'll do it'. However, he thinks there should be some follow-up to this type of homework: 'I think we should be encouraged to read more ... they should ask questions about the book', not so much because it might be an intellectual challenge as that 'you'd look like an absolute idiot because you hadn't read it'. He somewhat deprecatingly admits to listening to story tapes in bed at night: 'It sounds really bad,' he says; he later adds, 'It sounds really gay but if you're just laying there and you sort of listen to it ... you're not thinking about anything and so you can just go to sleep'. Presumably story tapes are associated, for him, with being read to at bedtime as a young child, something from which he now prefers to dissociate himself. He is on more confident ground when explaining that part of the reason he does not use the school library as much as he might is because it tends not to stock the kind of adult books he likes:

Charlie: ... some books what I read have got swearing in, 'cos they're adult books, but I, but my mum's always said, if you're good enough to read them books then good on you, but just don't use that sort of language elsewhere.

Charlie comes across as earnest. He takes an interest in what others have to say. As well as questioning Elizabeth about the Darren Shan books which he had not read, he speculates about why Jade likes the magazines she reads, *Pony Magazine* and *Horse&Rider*, which she swaps with her mother but does not become completely absorbed by: 'Isn't it harder to do with magazines, though?' he suggests.

Charlie readily attributes importance to the role of parents in young people's reading development:

Charlie: ... if [the parents] can't read or anything, they're not going to get their children as much into reading and so it's not going to help the children so they're not going to be interested in it, but whereas my mum and dad quite, read quite a bit on holiday. My dad doesn't read as much, 'cos he's quite busy, but they like reading.

His father's reading tastes in particular chime with Charlie's; for example, they both enjoy Chris Ryan books. Ryan, a former SAS officer, writes novels for adults and young readers.

Charlie: My dad was reading adult ones and I started reading these when I was about nine. I think he liked them. It was just something interesting and he got into them and I one day picked 'em up and I thought I ain't got a book to read I might as well read that.

Charlie's friend, Steve, is also a keen reader of Chris Ryan and they are both eager to explain his appeal. There are several points of interest in the following exchange: the distinctions being teased out (in part, in response to my questioning) between truth and fiction; the boys' substantial background knowledge about Chris Ryan's writing; the specific war in which he took part; their interactions with one another on the topic. Steve's contributions prompt Charlie to speak; it is Charlie who extends and develops the ideas.

Charlie: What it is, is there's one book he's writ and it was a true story. The others are fiction but he uses what he's, he's, his knowledge to write that book so the one I'm reading at the moment, *Ultimate Weapon*, is about

Steve: I want to read that one. That sounds good

Charlie: It's just about him basically but it's changed sort of and he's writ, he's put his knowledge into the book so instead of saying just completely fiction something you've never done in your life he's actually been there

GCH: He's fictionalising it

Charlie: The first book was true

Steve: *The One That Got Away*

GCH: Was that his autobiography then?

Charlie: No a story, but it was what happened to him, so he's an SAS man and he got dropped into Iraq in the first Gulf War

Steve: With an eight man crew

Charlie: And it just went wrong and they got compromised and they was like getting split and they had about 200K about £210 and he didn't know how to walk and he didn't have enough food and it was described as the biggest escape ever in history.

Steve: Didn't he get a Victoria's Cross?

Charlie: Yeah, he got the highest award ever. It's unbelievable that they made it.

Steve: And he was the only man out of the all eight who got back

Charlie: Three died, four got captured.

Charlie demonstrates fluency in terms of the discourse of the book and its subject matter in his use of statements like 'he got dropped into Iraq in the first Gulf War'; 'they got compromised'; 'it was described as the biggest escape ever in history'. He also pays attention to detail in his precision over how many were captured or died and his knowledge about the Victoria Cross being the highest possible military decoration (though he is mistaken about Ryan receiving it). By contrast, his language is less assured when attempting to adopt a more interpretive, critical stance: 'It's just about him basically but it's changed sort of and he's writ, he's put his knowledge into the book so instead of saying just completely fiction something you've never done in your life he's actually been there'. The emphatic point for Charlie is that Ryan's fiction gains kudos from the author having experienced the events he writes about. Charlie assumes he in turn

will gain knowledge about the way things are in the world from reading Ryan's work, knowledge which connects up with what he learns in other areas of his social life, from army cadets for example. However, the situation becomes more complicated when he is pressed to adopt a more critical stance towards what he reads, to move from acquiring knowledge towards evaluation and greater criticality. If, as he suggests below, he does not often talk about his reading, any comparisons he might make remain at the level of internal thought, unarticulated to a wider audience. He needs something not only to impel him to make his thoughts known to others but to view them from a different perspective; whilst Steve's prompting encourages Charlie to talk, it does not require him to be critical. However, sometimes the text itself can do that, as it seems was the case with his reading of Paul Rusesabagina and Tom Zoellner's *An Ordinary Man: The true story behind Hotel Rwanda*, the book of the film of *Hotel Rwanda*. Here, the horrific nature of what he was reading about means it is no longer sufficient to report the factual content; affective and evaluative dimensions also come into play, as the following data demonstrate.

'Who do you talk with about your reading?' was one of the interview questions which I knew from past experience was likely to lead to interesting insights into different students' reading practices. When asked this question, Charlie replies:

Charlie: Um, I don't really with my family. I've talked to my mates, but some books I've read, like some of the books, um have you seen the film *Hotel Rwanda*?

GCH: Er I haven't. I've seen the trailers for it

Charlie: Yeah, um, I've read a book on it. I didn't see the film. I read the book before the film and it was just shocking and so I talked to my friends really but I don't really talk to people 'cos it's just – some of the things I read, it's just it's not a thing I talk about

GCH: When you talked with your friends, did you talk about *Hotel Rwanda*?

Charlie: Yes, I talk about books that are quite interesting and some of the things that happen

GCH: So were you talking with them because you found it shocking do you think?

Charlie: Yeah, some of the things that happened it was just unbelievable. It's just how, it's that we had peacekeepers over there and we just stood back and watched and we couldn't intervene

Steve: Do you mean 'shocking' as in 'bad' or 'shocking' as in 'surprising'?

Charlie: Bad

GCH: And had your friends read the book or seen the film?

Charlie: I think some people may have seen the film but I was the only one to read the book ... the only film I've seen that was better than the book was *Hotel Rwanda*. The film was really good, because the book you just sort of, it was quite difficult to understand how hard it must have been but once you see the film you could see all the emotions on people's faces.

The shock Charlie expresses about *Hotel Rwanda* forces him to talk about it. He elaborates on, and begins to evaluate, what he found shocking about it in a thoughtful point about the international response to the genocide. Perhaps because of his army cadet experience, he aligns himself closely with the apparently impotent peace keeping forces, adopting the pronoun 'we': 'we just stood back and watched and we couldn't intervene'. His later comment about how the film helped him to understand the emotive power of the story is illuminating: the visual, moving image medium enables him to empathise more readily with characters caught up in a situation which to many readers, not just Charlie, is otherwise almost unimaginable.

It is also interesting to analyse Charlie's comments to discover his apparently ambivalent attitude towards talking about reading. Firstly he says that he does not usually talk with his family. As for his friends, the message is more complicated. He moves into the past tense to report that he has talked to them on occasions, but does not do so habitually. Then he suggests that because of the nature of *Hotel Rwanda* he did feel the need to talk: 'it was just shocking and so I talked to my friends'. Switching back to the present, he then denies that talking about reading is something he does: 'some of the things I read, it's just it's not a thing I talk about', only later to contradict himself and say, 'I talk about books that are quite interesting and some of the things that happen'. Furthermore, at the same time as stating that he does not often talk about his reading, he is of course doing just that. Having voluntarily raised the subject of *Hotel Rwanda*, he recalls (to use

Rosenblatt's terms) both an aesthetic reading (shock and disbelief), and an efferent reading (the peacekeepers' inability to intervene); it is arguably the interview questions that in this instance steer him away from the predominantly negative points he is otherwise tending to make. He did not hand in a reading journal later in the project, one possible reason being that he still preferred not to share his thoughts about what he was reading.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Charlie is a very committed reader. He is emphatic about his ability to become absorbed in what he read: 'You sort of feel like you're in there, actually just in the book, but you're sort of watching what's happening, you're not actually part of it but you're watching it'. He enjoys the Harry Potter books, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and many others. In the interview – if not elsewhere – he is eager to discuss his reading, with the whole group and me, initiating ideas as well as extending other people's.

Images of being a reader

The immediate social nature of the group interviews brought into sharp relief a particular matter of cultural value which was part of the motivation for not just the substantive aspects of this research project but its methodology as well: the image of young people as readers. One facet of the issue is how they perceive and represent themselves; another is how they think they are perceived and represented by others in society. I now discuss three notable instances where the students appear to adopt positions in which readers are represented as socially inept or essentialised in specifically gendered ways and one in which there is a hint that this stereotyping is merely superficial.

Readers as geeks and boffins

The first instance arose in a group consisting of Toby, Lee, Jessica and Louisa. The discussion was quite edgy amongst these four very different young people. It was not clear that any of them were particularly friends with one another, but they knew one another well. Toby and Lee had been to the same primary school; Lee and Jessica were in the same tutor group; Toby and Jessica had both been on the recent geography field trip to Iceland together. After half an hour of lively conversation about different kinds of reading, we were moving into the final stages of the interview. I asked the group what advice they would offer to people

training to be English teachers to motivate young people like them to extend themselves as readers. They replied, albeit hesitantly, that they would first and foremost need to overcome the image that they perceive readers to have:

Toby: Make it seem like, 'cos everyone thinks that reading's like something that

Lee: ... geeks do ... like boffins

Toby: Yeah, try to make it something that everyone can enjoy

GCH: How should they do that? What would they do?

Toby: I think um

Jessica: 'Cos usually everyone thinks that reading's for like ... geeks [*softly*] basically

GCH: Well, why, and what should

Jessica: I dunno, 'cos it's like if you go

GCH: 'Cos you're not, you're not, you wouldn't describe yourselves as that would you?

All: No

Lee: I would

GCH: You would? [*laughter*]

Jessica: But like if you, if you go into the library in school and spend lunchtime in the library and go and rent books all the time people might think you were a little bit ...

At this point the students make suggestions about role models and choosing certain kinds of books for particular kinds of readers. What they suggest is based on ideas they have already seen being adopted elsewhere – posters of celebrities reading, for example – rather than ideas growing out of their own personal experiences already evident in the interview. What I would argue is of greater interest here, however, is not just what they say but also what the process of the discussion *per se* signifies. It is helpful to recall Gee's concept of cultural models, the informal and usually implicit theories or 'story-lines' which serve to position people socially and culturally, because despite all that the students have already said about their interest in reading and books, a powerful cultural model which positions young people who read as *geeks* and *boffins*, now hovers threateningly.

The students appear unable to withstand its power although they seem embarrassed by it, hence the trailing off of their comments plus the joking and laughter. A couple of minutes later they return to the same point. Lee starts by drawing a verbal caricature which the others seem to enjoy. Jessica adds to it:

Lee: I don't know why, but I think at our age, people just associate ... when I think of the library and books I associate someone with jack-ups [*the others laugh*] and glasses and stuff

Jessica: ... and tee-shirts

GCH: You might have to fill me in [*laughter*]

Lee & Jessica: Trousers that are like this, above your ankle and up here ... ankle-flashers.

Lee's use of the word 'associate' suggests a subliminal awareness of how such cultural models work, and the subtlety with which they can endure if not challenged.

The second, related instance arises in a different group interview. Nathan (who, as we have already seen in his collage, was a proficient drawer of caricature figures) provides a verbal equivalent of the stereotypical library user. This time, however, it is an image of himself in the past. He remembers going to the local library when he was younger, offering a strange reminiscence, both painfully personal with uncomfortable tense changes between past and present, and yet distanced by the mode of telling.

Nathan: You go into a library like (*hastily*) not, not this one, but sometimes you like go into any library 'cos I did when I was little, and um you don't exactly find any of your friends there 'cos they're like playing football, and because I was quite chubby then I really couldn't play football 'cos I was like slow, um I still am, and um when I went into there I just like didn't find any of my friends but they were like just people who had like no friends, they were just like sitting there with glasses on just going (*he mimes someone reading*).

Nathan's words establish a tension between participating in sporting activity and reading, an opposition which at the same time he himself bridges since he has already said he likes both. If, following Massey, we see trajectories like Nathan's as 'always under construction' (Massey, 2005, p. 9), we can also see him playing an active part in that construction, weaving a delicately balanced route between

what appear to be cultural models of sportsman and reader to which he adheres within this particular social context and his actual experience of being both a committed reader and a sports enthusiast about which he has already talked earlier in the interview. Analysing his use of language, we see him shifting between 'you' as a generic personal pronoun, 'I' and 'they', creating uncertainty as to whether he is talking about himself or others, representing library users as unsporty, chubby, slow, friendless and wearing glasses. Although he no longer goes to the library anymore, the memory as he represents it here forms part of his trajectory all the same.

Two further points are interesting, however. Firstly, cultural models which represent readers as 'geeks' and 'boffins' do not appear anywhere else in the data. Thus, at least within the context of this project, it seems as if they are brought into being and sustained within the immediate social sphere of peer group talk. However, the second interesting point is that this sphere is also the place where cultural models can be *confronted*, even re-configured. Four minutes after the subject was raised by Toby, Lee and Jessica, we had moved on to talk about the writing they did, when Jessica interrupted me:

GCH: Talking about writing ... sorry

Jessica: I was just going to say, you know when we said like you, if you went to the library or something you'd be classed as a geek, well I think that's only at our age. Like, like um in primary school if you read loads of books it was like 'oh, wow, how do you read so many of them' but at this age it's like 'oh I don't read at all' but then as you get to, like I've got a next-door neighbour at sixth form and she reads so much everyday ...

Lee: Yeah, well everyone does

GCH: And that's OK?

Jessica: And at like their age it gets back to being fine again, but I think it's like just at our age, we're like teenagers that want to be seen as cool.

Lee: I think it's just our generation

Jessica: No, I think it's just the age.

Clearly, Jessica has been mulling over this point; luckily, there is still time and space for her to return to it and re-adjust her position even though at this stage she

may not have secured support from other group members. Lee appears to want to stick to the original caricature but Jessica stands firm herself. However, in Nathan's group discussion, in response to a challenge from me about his boy-in-the-library vignette, he merely shores up his position:

GCH: It's kind of a stereotype though, isn't it, you know

Nathan: I just felt really sorry for them, like why aren't they playing football?

The difference between Jessica's and Nathan's respective stances is a reminder of the complexity of genuine social interaction and of how much more than a mere exchange of words is required for stereotypical ideas to be challenged and transformed so that different understandings are reached.

Reading and writing

The third discussion in which stereotypical ideas became a prominent issue arose from another interview when once again Lee was a member of the group. The others were Victoria, Andie and Mehmet. When I questioned Lee about volunteering to be interviewed a second time, he insisted he had been thinking more about reading since we had last met. I agreed to let him stay, differentiating questions as necessary to take account of the fact that we had already met once before. He often made bold assertions, sometimes gender-specific, which sparked controversy. On this occasion, the issue of not just reading but also writing came into focus. However, rebuttals came ever more swiftly and gave rise to the most heated discussion of any in the six group interviews.

Victoria and Andie were friends who said they sometimes talked with one another about books and made recommendations to one another. Mehmet and Lee had been in the same primary school class so had known one another for a long time and reminisced enthusiastically about one of their former class teachers. Lee described him as an 'absolute legend' and Mehmet agreed he had probably been an influence on them as readers because he was an avid reader who used to read long sections of Anthony Horowitz books aloud to the class each day. They also admired him as a Physical Education teacher. So, in what followed, each student had someone else in the group with whom they aligned themselves and who offered them time to pause and listen as the argument about reading became

increasingly animated. The idea of reading as gendered arose when considering how teachers could select books which a class of thirty different students might all appreciate.

The discussion begins with them agreeing that class texts need to be ones that everyone feels strongly about, but they are unable to agree what sort of texts those might be. One suggestion is that the recent terrorist attack on Glasgow airport would be of interest to everybody. Andie disagrees, specifically from a gendered perspective, saying that 'girls might not necessarily want to read about terrorism'. Lee chips in that 'Girls just like personal issues ... about kissing their first boy and stuff like that'. Victoria ignores his comment and embarks on a different argument, still from a highly gendered perspective, namely that reading can help you understand how other people think without your having to be like them:

Victoria: ... reading a girls' book would influence you because you'd realise what girls – I'm not trying to make you guys be like ladies or anything – but um it's just if you read the books that girls read you'd get influenced by like how we actually think.

Despite her own distinguishing between boys and girls as readers, the others do not engage with her point. Instead, Mehmet argues that 'you've got to find a book that will influence both boys and girls and if you can't find a book then you've got to obviously be split up' to which suggestion Andie replies, 'Why not have a range of books?' At this point in the discussion Victoria comes up with a specific solution, one which neatly supports her own argument:

Victoria: What about *Noughts and Crosses*? ... It's about a relationship but it's cut up between the point of view from the boy and the point of view from the girl, so even if it's just reading about the girl Sephy then you'd still get influenced about the guy, 'cos you'd hear what she thinks about him and what he thinks about her [*trails off into further inaudible comments of disagreement*].

No one responds to this suggestion. Instead, Lee continues to worry away at practicalities and takes up the earlier point about possibly splitting the class:

Lee: ... maybe if the girls don't want to read a certain book or the boys don't want to, split them in half and like give the boys a book on their topic that they all vote on like say once a week and everything and the girls another book and then they could like, maybe like a book club and come back and give their opinions, give a debate and everything.

I interject to ask how teachers can encourage people to read things they do not know they like, a problem which seems to interest Mehmet who agrees that 'It can be a safety zone can't it?'. However, he cannot immediately work out how readers might move out of it since he remains convinced that people will not want to try books they assume they will not like. Victoria suggests another compromise, but one in which she reiterates the value of seeing things from other people's perspectives and again resorts to separating girls from boys:

Victoria: ... even if you had a pair of good books and you wanted to split the class into the girls and the boys so the girls read like all the girlie books and the boys read all the army books, if you split it between girls and boys and give them two books, like two – a girl and a guy book – and read both of them then you'd get to see like two different people's point of view.

Interestingly, at this juncture Lee alights on a point that Aidan Chambers makes very clearly in *The reading environment* (1991):

Lee: I think when we're like that and you set your minds ... you don't wanna read it you just don't really enjoy it because you set out not to enjoy it.

In a chapter called 'The set and the setting' Chambers argues that what he calls the *set* of our minds towards an activity, in other words our attitude towards it, can be far more powerful than the *setting* or environment in which the idea occurs to us:

Set, it seems, is a more powerful influence than setting. But both play a part in forming our attitude to what we're doing, and also modify each other as they condition our behaviour.

Reading is no different in this respect from any other activity. If we read willingly, expecting pleasure, we are likely to find enjoyment. If we are forced to read as a duty, expecting no delight, we are likely to find it a boring business (*ibid.*, p. 16).

It is interesting to note that what Lee says is simultaneously being enacted in the very conversation to which he is contributing. Each member of the group has a different *set* and cannot find a way, even in this setting, to engage with everyone else's point of view and break the stand-off.

A couple of minutes later, the discussion turns from reading to writing. Lee admits how hard he finds it to remember what he has been taught about writing

when doing exams and what a 'chore' it usually is for him. It is not something that he really enjoys. He is not alone amongst his peers in conveying either a negative or utilitarian attitude towards writing stories. For other students, like Bekki, it is something she used to do for pleasure when she was younger but does not do any more, as if she has somehow grown out of it. Instead, as we have already seen, she likes writing song lyrics as does Luke who mentions that since he can play piano and electric guitar he sometimes writes 'mini songs and notes' though he adds that he does not perceive this as 'really actually writing'. In yet another interview group, Nathan, like Bekki, suggests he also feels writing stories is a thing of the past, 'like in Year 1, when I was like really tiny, I wanted to impress the teachers'.

However, here Andie says that unlike Lee she *does* enjoy writing, although the example she initially cites is not story-writing but song lyrics. She explains that '... if I'm like really worried about something or angry I just like I write a song or a – something like that' and, in response to a question from me about whether she keeps a diary, she says she does. The boys argue that this is because she is a girl, even when I challenge them to justify their comments:

Lee: ... girls just want to go on and feel like 'oh maybe I wanna see how this story progresses' and stuff in their mind, but boys just get really bored

GCH: [*with amusement*] How do you explain all the men who end up being successful writers and song-writers and lyricists and things?

Mehmet: I think they're more like lady-writers than they are man-writers to be honest.

GCH: I think you need some evidence for that!

It is Andie who provides evidence in the form of Kevin Brooks, whose work she has already mentioned earlier in the discussion, saying how his dark realist style had affected her:

Andie: I get quite emotionally involved in books, like there's a book by Kevin Brooks called *Road of the Dead* and this girl um dies 'cos she gets raped and then murdered and her two brothers go out to like find out who did it but I found like at the end of the book I was actually grieving for the girl.

Now she states what a good writer Brooks is and argues, as does Victoria, that men and women writers can be seen as equal. Mehmet then volunteers an interesting speculation, that perhaps men choose events in the world to write about whereas women choose what is personal to them. Lee agrees, although ironically he cites Andy McNab and Chris Ryan, writers who (as we have already learnt from Charlie) often draw on both personal experiences such as being members of the Special Air Service (SAS) and events in the world. He extends the point to suggest that the age of a writer might also have some bearing on the matter:

Lee: I think men write when they're a bit older and ladies write a bit sooner ... ladies say 'oh I wanna be a writer' but men just don't, I think, have their mind set on ... being a writer and then when they – something happens to them, as soon as it, they just think 'oh that's really good, maybe I should put that down' and stuff like that, but I think ladies just write straight ...

Andie responds by arguing that she writes for herself, not to show anyone, Victoria adding that it can be a good way to 'get stress out'. However, the boys reply that they do not think writing just for yourself makes sense and furthermore it is not what they are talking about. They are referring to being published as writers. The debate veers to and fro before it lights on the subject of diary writing again. The boys insist they do not think writing personal things down but not letting anyone else read them can be helpful; it is just something women and girls do, not men. Finally, Victoria brings Michael Palin to her aid:

Victoria: You can get books of men that have kept diaries. Like even Michael Palin ... he didn't mean for his diary about the Himalayas to become a book, but because he made the whole TV show about it he decided that his diary should become a book and people should experience what he experienced without having to go there. Does that make sense?

All: Yeah.

Victoria: So, he *did* keep a diary, but he didn't mean for it to – even with Andie's songs or her diary isn't meant for other people, then some day she might make it into a book, or publish a book, or be like a musician.

Lee concedes the point about Michael Palin, but he modifies his concession by suggesting that men would not voluntarily put themselves forward as writers; someone else would have to persuade them:

Lee: I think sometimes men might just like keep it and then one of their friends might read it and think that's really good and stuff and then they think 'oh, really' and stuff like that whereas I think ladies just think 'oh that's really good' for themselves and then try and get it published.

In the course of this exchange I found myself intervening, in part to enable everyone to be heard and in part because it was hard to resist the teacherly instinct to capitalise on such discussion to encourage critical debate. However, all four students were willing to venture their ideas anyway and what appeared to be happening was that the dispute was forcing the students continually to have to re-arrange their thinking, hence laying the foundations for exploratory rather than merely disputational talk (Mercer, 2000) and establishing the possibility of representing themselves differently as readers. Nevertheless, the force of the cultural models being brought to bear meant that considerable resistance was needed to counter them and try to view ideas from each other's perspectives.

Subverting stereotypes: taking time to talk

The fourth, rather different instance I analyse occurred in the discussion in which Nathan participated. There were three other boys – Sam, Xavier and Stuart – plus one girl – Chanelle. The boys appeared to be friends. They also knew Chanelle well as a classmate. The group were the final five students in the class to be interviewed. At an early stage in the discussion, I asked whether anyone could think of anything they had really liked that was a good reading experience for them. Nathan's reply was cautious, as if he was not yet sure in front of the others, or me, how far to characterise himself as a keen and confident reader, even though his collage suggests he was.

Nathan: I do enjoy reading. I, I've read stuff like The Edge Chronicles 'cos they're quite good, um, um, it's really it's quite hard to find you know like any other books I really actually wanna like get into.

Xavier had just said that he liked reading but it was sometimes hard to find a book he wanted to read. Nathan echoed the point before his answer trailed off. His contribution therefore builds cumulatively on Xavier's, reinforcing his friend's position and aligning himself with it and also, but only very tentatively, introducing The Edge Chronicles series. The visual enthusiasm of his earlier drawing is absent here. Instead, he states casually that the series is 'quite good',

apparently conforming to the social positioning I have already discussed which inhibits young people from being overly enthusiastic about reading in the presence of their peers.

As becomes clear a bit later in the interview, Nathan is aware that at least some of the group already know he likes *The Edge Chronicles*, but he still proceeds hesitantly, as if feeling his way within this unfamiliar context of the research interview. However, his approach changes as the session progresses and Nathan displays more confidence, beginning to offer what is an elaboration on his drawing, the predicate to some of the subjects he presented there. Half way through the discussion, he becomes more animated. He now characterises himself overwhelmingly (verbally, where in his picture he did so visually) as an enthusiastic reader of series books.

Nathan: [The] first time I got engrossed was probably when I was reading *The Edge Chronicles* when they first came out 'cos me gran got me the very first book and I was like 'Oooh, joy' and I was reading that and then the next one came out and I thought 'Oh, this might be good', and I read that one and I read that one and I read that one and I read that one, and um and then I read another one, 'cos usually I just like get on to like series 'cos they're just written in the same way and I like so I just read one called *Spirit Walker* and I read that and so I wasn't exactly brought up with reading.

Shortly afterwards, when Stuart reflects on what might have influenced him as a reader, he positions himself unexpectedly in relation to Nathan:

Stuart: Well, my mum and dad read to me when I was little and then I sort of didn't read that much and then Nathan bought me one of *The Edge Chronicles* and then that's when I started to get engrossed in other books as well.

GCH: Why did he suddenly buy it for you?

Stuart: It was my birthday.

Nathan: ... and I had nothing else to give him.

GCH: Was that a good present to get?

Stuart: Yeah.

GCH: Well, obviously, if it got you started ...

Nathan: (*laughing*) cheapest ...

The fact that these comments occurred about half way through the interview is yet another reminder of the importance of extended time for talking about reading. If Nathan were to be defined by his early statements only and without the evidence of his drawing, it would be tempting to cast him as a not particularly confident or enthusiastic reader. As he relaxes into the discussion, though, he feels safe enough with the other group members and me to be more forthcoming and, in this instance if not elsewhere (as in his boy-in-the-library vignette), to resist the stereotypical image. His contributions are often qualified with phrases such as 'It's maybe a little bit weird ...' when telling us how when he was younger he became engrossed by a wildlife magazine for a while; or he defuses the seriousness by making links with his enjoyment of humour:

Nathan: I like to read poetry usually before I go to bed

GCH: Do you?

Nathan: Stuff like that. I just like – I just look for funny thing like and I'll go to sleep and dream about that.

GCH: Who's your favourite poet?

Nathan: I'm into *Gargling with Jelly* [Brian Patten].

The interview (here, as with Charlie's group) appears with time to offer a sufficiently secure context for students like Nathan to begin to rise above the cultural model which – in the company of their peers – otherwise quickly stifles discussion about what and how they read under the weight of gender stereotyping. Now we glimpse an alternative representation: a boy who gives a copy of one of his favourite books to another boy as a birthday present, who reads poetry in bed at night. However, these glimpses possibly only come to light because reading has been made a talking point and enough time for talk has been allowed to help them realise that they can speak their views without reprisals.

Students' views of reading relationships with parents and grandparents

Two of the questions I asked in the group interviews were 'If someone you knew was going to talk about you as a reader, what do you think they would say? Who do you think knows you well as a reader?' Jessica, as I have already indicated, was a student who steered a careful course in the group interview, on the one hand mindful of how she might be perceived by the others as a reader, on the other

hand keen to pursue independent lines of inquiry and keep out of conversational cul-de-sacs. She introduced herself as involved in a variety of sport – hockey, netball, athletics – and, as a reader, interested in girlie magazines, bits of newspapers and following currently high-profile stories such as the disappearance of Madeleine McCann on the home page of her computer. She was also an avid reader of fiction, someone with distinctive tastes and confident enough to read quite some way into a book before deciding whether or not she wanted to pursue it:

Jessica: I don't really like the Harry Potter books either but I like the *Northern Lights* and *The Subtle Knife* ... I've read the um first two. I read the first one ages and ages ago and then I couldn't really get into the second one but then I read the first one again and then the second one and now I can't really get into the third one ... they start off with different like um different people ... you have to read the first hundred pages to get into it so it's quite difficult to.

The following summer holiday, she finally read all seven Harry Potter books over a two-week period having been recommended them so often by friends and family. She wrote in her journal, 'I enjoyed them all and even though they are descriptive, there is so much action that they are very easy to get into'.

When I asked her who she thought knew her best as a reader she says her father, James:

Jessica: ... he would probably say that I read quite a lot of books and quite different books but er ... fantasy ones and stuff like that but then like all the girlie books.

She thinks he knows her well as a reader because he reads quite a lot as well. This leads to a point about parents recommending their children books to read and, crucially, whether book recommendation is reciprocal:

Jessica: ... he reads quite a lot as well so some of the books he like says that I should read because he thinks they're really good as well.

GCH: And do you?

Jessica: Yeah, quite a few of them but some of them are like are more like adult books quite difficult ... sometimes as well I tell him books that I've read that I think he should read.

GCH: And does he?

Jessica: Yeah, well I read the Malorie Blackman ones *Noughts and Crosses* and everything and he read the first one.

Parental involvement with children at Jessica's age is commonly understood to imply provision of reading material and encouragement of young people by adults to take up their recommendations. Only very occasionally, however, is attention paid to the agency these young readers exert in return. In the interview with her grandmother, Betty, Kirsty asks whether she is reading a book at the moment. She replies:

Betty: Yeah, the one you got me fa' Christmas. I love it. Its about a young girl whos boyfriend joins the army ... but her secret other boyfriend who she truly loves is in the army too. They both write letters to the young girl and she knows that the boyfriend she truly loves is the one and the other boyfriend is a fake, who doesn't love her at all, hes a ladies man, a flirt with the girls when he's home from the Army. He'll go straight to tha' pub and drink.

Betty's plot and character summaries underline for Kirsty the suitability of the book she has given Betty for Christmas. The gift affirms Kirsty's existing knowledge of her grandmother as a reader as well as the potential impact of exchanging books with other people. In a similar vein, I have already referred to Lily reading aloud with her mother and thus sharing books in a reciprocal arrangement. However, there often appears to be another cultural model to be addressed, namely the idea that teenagers will not want to read the same books as their parents enjoyed when they were the same age, or even the books they recommend now. The model is corroborated by survey responses such as in those in the *Children's Reading Choices* project where a 'substantial proportion of the girls and boys interviewed felt that families are unlikely to recommend good books. It was generally agreed that parents chose dull, boring, difficult and old-fashioned books' (Hall and Coles, 1999, p. 100). It seems at first as if that attitude is going to be perpetuated here:

Jessica: ... what started me reading probably is my dad kind of says to me books that he's read when he was younger when he was like

Toby: Can't stand those books

Lee: I can't either.

Jessica, once again, holds her ground, saying that her father did not read the kinds of books they are thinking of and searching for a particular title that James has

often suggested she try. With some guessing from me, she finally remembers that it is Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast trilogy.

Jessica: He really, really liked that when he was younger and he bought ... the first one for my birthday but I've never really read it because it was really difficult there's so much detail.

Jessica did make another attempt at reading *Titus Groan* when she completed her journal the following summer, reading seventy pages before setting it aside. It was still too detailed for her 'and I find it difficult to concentrate on the plot when there is so much description of everything' (though having enjoyed Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy and going on to read all seven Harry Potter books in quick succession, it should not be assumed that it was description *per se* that is problematic, rather the balance between plot and description in Mervyn Peake's descriptive writing in the Gormenghast trilogy). Jessica nevertheless wrote in her journal that she would perhaps understand it more when she was older, indicating a clear sense of the future direction of her reading trajectory into adulthood.

Other reading journals likewise revealed several students taking up parents' suggestions about what to read and sometimes expressing surprise at the outcome, for example Sam who read Clive Cussler's *Polar Shift*. At the beginning he wrote, 'Im not sure about reading this book because I have never read a clive cussler novel before. Also it is my dad's book so it is probably boring!!!'. At the end he concluded, 'This book surprised me as I was expecting it to be boring because it is my dads book but it turned out to be one of the best books I've ever read'. The evidence seems to suggest, here and elsewhere, that more students do, in fact, share reading preferences with their parents than either they will admit to or, perhaps, realise. Indeed, in the group interviews, many represent their reading relationships with parents as positive. Abigail, like Bekki, Thomas, and Charlie, is keen to be recognised as a developing young adult whilst still acknowledging her links with favourite childhood reading. When asked how she would describe herself as a reader, she replies:

Abigail: I read quite a lot of young adult novels rather than teenage ones as such, but I'd like to go on, 'cos my mum's a member of a reading group, and when she gets a new book for the reading group she buys it and keeps it at home for when we, when me and my sister

are a little bit older when we can read them so that's what I'd like to go on to next, after teenage novels I'd like to go on to mum's adult ones.

In her collage, Abigail had already alluded to the way books could enhance friendships for her. Here, in reply to my question about who she talks with about reading she expands on her earlier comments:

Abigail: There's only one book, one series of books, the Georgia Nicolson series by Louise Rennison, that me and like my best friend, Denise, we read, we read them at the same time and we sit in tutor rooms laughing at each other's books and we've got a real link through the books, but that's the only time I really ever talk about [reading].

Shortly afterwards, however, she says that she does talk with her mother about reading because they enjoy the same sort of books, for example fantasy and historical novels, and read companionably:

Abigail: Last weekend, in the nice weather ... me and my mum both reading outside a lot ... sunbathing and stuff.

Abigail is, furthermore, one of the few students to acknowledge the influence of the English teaching at Cornford on her reading, even though many of them explicitly appreciate Rosa's attempts to encourage their independent reading. On the whole, they are more forthcoming about teachers and approaches they remember from primary school. Abigail, however, appears to make a specific connection between her reading development and what she has been learning in English about reading:

Abigail: Last year, in Year 7, our English teacher, I think she really got me to think about our books differently, like I used to, like I've always enjoyed reading, but like I used to just read a book and like the story, but now I kind of read more into it, think about what they're doing and maybe their past or what you think's gonna happen Yeah, I just see them differently now, I'm looking for things that I've never, I didn't use to.

A similar point is made by Lily, Freya, Floella and Zara in their group interview, borne out in some of the comments they later make in their reading journals. Their Year 7 English teacher appeared to have taught them reading techniques to help them adopt more interpretive stances towards what they read. As Lily explains:

Lily: I quite like reading books like short stories in the class ... books that like have second meaning ... Miss read a short story in class and ... it was kind of like one story and then if you looked deeper into it there was a separate story in it and then we had to write a different one, didn't we?

Most of the students' answers about how others perceive them as readers are framed in terms of what kinds of books they see them enjoying reading. With these latter comments about the teachers, however, there is a discernable shift to thinking about concepts of reading as well as the texts read. It is rare evidence of a Vygotskian approach to systematic teaching about reading conceptually that I had anticipated might be a more prominent facet of data generated by these students. Whilst it did seem more prevalent by the end of Year 9 when they were writing their reading journals, at this stage and in the context of group interviews, it was seldom mentioned.

Participants, spectators and bystanders

One final strand of the interviews I analyse is the students' answers to the question of what they thought happened when they became very absorbed in what they were reading. It is interesting for several reasons: it provides evidence about the kinds of experience habitual and committed readers perceive reading offers them; it can be tallied with their parents' and grandparents' answers to the same question; the answers afford insight into all dimensions of the research, touching as they do on the social, cultural, spatial and historical.

A thematic analysis of what the students said when asked this question in the interviews shows a variety of ways of conceptualising the process of becoming so absorbed in what you are reading that you appear to move into a different space. The first is to describe the experience as place-based, as if reading moved you almost physically to somewhere else. Many students, like Charlie, feel that 'you're in there, actually just in the book'; it is sometimes described as another world which, as Abigail says, 'you get a way into it and you're lost in it'. Not surprisingly, they often struggle to express their transition into this world, across the space which Seamus Heaney calls the *frontier of writing* 'the line that divides the actual conditions of our daily lives from the imaginative representation of those conditions in literature' (Heaney, 1995, p. xvi). The movement is very delicately balanced, one which Heaney himself returns to again and again, trying

to articulate its essence. In one of his prose poems in *District and Circle*, 'Tall Dames', he writes about the occasional arrival of travellers in the village where he lived as a child and his remembered sense of the otherness they created, which he expresses as an otherness of both time and place:

You encountered them in broad daylight, going about their usual business, yet there was always a feeling that they were coming towards you out of storytime ... Every time they landed in the district, there was a sense of extra-ness in the air, as if a gate had been left open in the usual life, as if something might get in or get out (Heaney, 2006, p. 38).

Mehmet finds a succinct way to depict the sense in which reading involves passing through such gateways. He refers to how he positioned himself when reading a particular section of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*:

Mehmet: I kind of made myself a bystander in there. I could just imagine myself standing there and that I'd actually seen it 'cos I'd been so involved in the book I thought afterwards when I put the book down I thought, I felt like I'd actually been there.

Mehmet's use of the word 'afterwards' confirms Heaney's notion that the experience is not merely place-based, but spatial (to use Massey's term again); that is, it has a temporal dimension as well in that the reader appears not just to be transported to another place but into a different sense of time as well. Furthermore, Mehmet refers to himself almost as an artist might: 'I kind of made myself ...'; 'I could imagine myself ...'. He not only imagines the world of the book but he seems to create himself as a reader within that world.

The term 'bystander' is replicated in other students' responses. Charlie describes it more visually as 'watching what's happening, you're not actually part of it but you're watching it'. Others describe the experience in specifically filmic terms. Freya, for example, says, 'I kind of imagine it in my head like things going on, not just staying still ... A movie in my head'. This prompts Floella to suggest that perhaps it's like 'in *Big Brother* when they have the cameras ... but there's no [inaudible] people and it's really strange. It's just like you are the person walking but you're always sort of set back, looking down on it. It's just really strange'. Nathan compares it with a computer game, saying that whilst he does not feel he in any way becomes the character in the book, it is as if he just behind, observing closely:

Nathan: I don't exactly feel like I'm that person. I just like, 'cos if you like, get an image of that person you just like watch them and if they're like doing something, you're like right behind them, I can't exactly see their face, I just like see the back of them doing stuff. It's like *The Sims* in a way.

One implication of adopting this type of stance is that it enables not merely interpretive but critical evaluation of character precisely because the reader remains at one remove from the narrative events and hence gains the necessary perspective. The importance of this kind of reader positioning is an idea I return to when analysing reading journal responses in Chapter 8.

A rather different stance is temporarily losing all sense of the immediate surroundings, and hence – for the time being – the facility for criticism. Lee is definitive: 'I'm just blacked out from everything else and if somebody tries to speak to me I won't hear them'. Shifting timescales seem even more pronounced, however. For some, like Thomas, it is because he claims not to imagine anything whilst he is actually reading; however, afterwards 'when I'm in bed or just walking around ... I get feelings and stuff ... I get the image later'. Freya, meanwhile, has a slightly different take on the way the presence of a book lingers when you are no longer actually reading it: 'I'm getting really stuck into a book and then I have to put it down to go and do something, like I'm asked to do something else, then, um, I kind of forget what I'm meant to be doing in everyday life and I keep thinking about the book'. There is also acknowledgement of the fact that it takes time to reach a state of absorption in a book and then there is a strong desire to continue reading, not to mention grappling with the pleasurable tension between wanting to read on quickly to find out what happens and not wanting to finish an enjoyable book.

Accomplishing complexity

Evidence from the group interviews fleshes out the students' and other people's perceptions of them as readers and shows how complex they are. Superficially, the students often adopt one particular stance, strongly influenced it seems by the immediate presence of their peers. Beneath the surface, however, other currents flow. These are made available for exploration firstly through the dialogue of the group interview format but, crucially, by the imperative of the interview not just as an educational but also as a specifically social event, a negotiated

accomplishment in which the talk generates and has the potential to transform students' thinking in ways which could not have been foreseen at the outset because the talk arises from particular trajectories coming into contact with one another and not always rubbing along comfortably. Indeed, it is often from the tensions that form that students find themselves impelled to develop their arguments further.

Wherever new meanings are constructed jointly, rather than familiar knowledge being simply reiterated, the interviews can be construed as social, prompted by the exigencies of explicit talk about multiple ways of reading, multiple reading preferences and different views of what it means to be a keen reader in the context of their peer group. In terms of these particular students, as I have outlined above, some important facets of reading as social interaction emerge from the data, especially where difficulty or difference confronts them. Examples include occasions when they wrestle with cultural models of being a reader or being a writer and find themselves either at odds with one another or with the cultural model; when they are asked to articulate their experience of absorption in reading and its peculiar imaginative hold; when they are compelled to articulate aspects of reading they have hitherto taken for granted or left unspoken. I discuss the implications of social aspects of reading such as these in the final chapter of the thesis. In Chapter 7, meanwhile, I turn to the interviews with parents and grandparents, viewing them from a predominantly historical theoretical perspective.

7 STUDENT INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS: A HISTORICAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Analysing the data from a historical theoretical perspective

I have already discussed why viewing students' reading from a historical theoretical perspective forms part of this research. The rationale is to explore the potential difference it makes to any construction of young people as readers to consider their readership not just in their contemporary social or cultural contexts but historically as well. The interviews with parents and grandparents are therefore a crucial element within this project of what Massey calls 'the spatialities of knowledge production' (Massey, 2003, p. 74) because they provide a particular emphasis on the historical dimensions of the students' readership. The data the interviews generate, like some of the data from the reading journey collages, serve to balance diachronically the more synchronic material gathered in the course of this research, in keeping with Massey's concept of space as *space-time*. However, in this chapter, I elaborate specifically my reasons for taking a *historical* not merely a *spatial* (or *spatio-temporal*) stance, focusing attention on data generated when students interviewed a parent or grandparent about *their* reading.

Interviews with people who have known the students all their lives (as distinct from a teacher or a friend) offer a good opportunity to correlate data with data from the reading journey collages and students' answers to some of the questions addressed in the group interviews. All thirty students found someone who was willing to be interviewed and, via Rosa, their work was passed on to me. I responded to each student individually. One, however, was returned without a consent form and three with consent forms unsigned so the data from these four interviews have not been included in the analysis which follows. Of the thirty students, four girls and one boy interviewed their grandmothers; two girls and four boys interviewed their fathers; twelve girls and seven boys interviewed their mothers. As already stated, quotations from the interviews retain the students' grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Earlier in the thesis I explained that the decision to include a historical dimension to the research was in part influenced by several prominent researchers in the field

of reading history all of whom have drawn heavily on readers' autobiographies for evidence of how ordinary readers in the past have read and viewed their reading (Altick, 1957; Vincent, 1981; Rose, 1995; 2001; 2007; 2008). Altick, Vincent and Rose all comment on the ephemerality and relative scarcity of such evidence and hence its special value to anyone interested in individual readers' perspectives on their reading and how others like them may also have read. As Vincent vividly describes it, 'the autobiographies can be seen as projecting a pencil of light into the darkness of the unspoken memories of men and women whose lives were conditioned by the same social experience' (Vincent, 1981, p. 7). All three researchers espouse values which are in keeping with reader-response theory and their methodology is informed by a democratic stance towards their subjects. Rose, for example, writes that:

The new historiography of reading is marked by a general dissatisfaction with the Frankfurt School, marxist criticism, poststructuralism, semiotics and much feminist criticism, all of which tended to treat the ordinary reader as the passive victim of mass culture or capitalism or discourses of patriarchy (Rose, 2007, p. 602).

Readers therefore take centre stage in their work (in ways of which Rosenblatt would approve), but the light being shone onto them illuminates their historical context as well, allowing even more richly layered detail to emerge from the shadows. The readers, as constructed by their autobiographies, are distinctive, idiosyncratic and, crucially, unpredictable. As Vincent writes:

However many autobiographies are collected, they remain separate literary works. The larger the group the better are we able to discern the particular identity of any one item, but although there are times when it is useful to aggregate certain aspects of the autobiographies in order to gain some idea of the relationship of the group to the known qualities of the working class as a whole, they are not a statistically accurate cross-section of the working class and no truths, either in general or in particular, can be deduced by adding up their contents and dividing by the total number. It is as units of literature they must be studied (Vincent, 1981, p. 10).

Interviewer/interviewee relationships

I was aware from the outset that conducting interviews with parents and grandparents would represent a number of challenges for the students, hence the prior work on author interviews outlined in Chapter 4. Although each student

worked within the same genre and could use the same interview schedule, the interviews were conducted individually and responses will have been informed and affected by a whole range of variables such as age, stance towards reading and the quite particular relationship between the two participants. The close relationship between interviewer and respondent which mediates the otherwise distant relationship between respondent and researcher is, I suggest, a major difference between my work and that of the historians of reading and education cited above.

When analysing the written transcripts to understand what view of reading is being represented by the interviewees, I was mindful of how the relationship between interviewer and interviewee might have affected what was said. For example, quite often there are clear indications of jokiness as when James tells Jessica 'I have made lots of recommendations to what you should read, but you never take any notice of them!', something we already know not to be the case from Jessica's comments in the group interview.

Harder to discern is the tone of Stuart's mother, Christine, in her final point about how much she enjoys reading. She has made several comments about not having enough time to read because of family responsibilities:

I look forward to the time when my family have left home and I can go through the list of books (and I do keep a list) that I have wanted to read all the years I have had my family at home in the hope that I will be able to read them all when I am older.

Is this a wry but affectionate comment or does it comprise a more deeply-felt yearning? Such ambiguity serves as a reminder of the complexity of analysing transcripts of interviews conducted by other people; it also points up the linguistic challenge for students writing up an event like this. The completed interviews therefore comprise a negotiated accomplishment as much as my earlier interviews with student groups.

The interviews are also a rich source of different kinds of data. Several write-ups include pictures: Floella has a photo of her and her sister in bed with their grandmother, Audrey, who is reading them one of Joyce Lankester Brisley's Milly-Molly-Mandy books; Lily ends her interview transcript with a picture of her

father, Keith, in his pilot's uniform, sitting in the cockpit of his plane and smiling out at the camera; Abigail includes different shots of bookshelves in her house and intersperses them with her writing. However, it is in the discourse itself that the rich layering is mostly to be found especially, as I have already suggested, in terms of *repetition* and *recollection* (Gardner, 2003; 2010). Firstly, therefore, I analyse responses to questions designed to encourage rehearsal of deeply embedded personal memories of reading which shape the kind of readers the adults now are, to show whether and how the adults' reading 'journeys' are confluent with their (grand)children's. Secondly, I analyse responses to questions broadly designed to explore whether and how reflecting explicitly, often critically, on some of the broader characteristics of reading for earlier generations may contribute to different ways in which young people are represented as readers now. These interviews with parents or grandparents and the historical perspectives they add to the social, cultural and spatial perspectives on students' reading are another way in which this research aims to make an original contribution to the field.

Biographical details

The grandparents appear to have been born just before or during World War II and the parents in the 1950s-60s. The opening interview questions about where they grew up and their memories of what it was like as a young person living there yield a range of interesting memories. More than half the adults say they grew up in English villages and most remember them as friendly places where they knew everyone and there were plenty of other children to play with. Thomas's mother, Steph, is not untypical when she recalls:

Yes I grew up in a village, and it was lovely, I had lots of friends, I was able to play out in the garden and there was never any trouble ... [I] used to be out for [h]ours and, and, um it was lovely, it was a good childhood.

Mehmet's father, Ahmet, grew up in Turkey where, he says:

It was a different style of life compared to today ... everything was very basic but we still enjoyed life as much as we could with passion, with love, with care, with good relations not high technology generally everything was made by hand, basic things.

Four say they grew up on estates, which two describe as 'supposedly rough' yet happy and enjoyable places to live. Christine says that where she grew up compares favourably with where she currently lives:

It was a very working class area on the south coast of England and I (and my parents) knew most of the neighbours unlike where we live now. My happiest memories come from living here, I had a good life, though money was very tight and my parents were quite strict (compared to many of my friends).

Andie's mother, Maria, has particularly vivid memories of early childhood in London:

I lived and grew up in the Eastend of London when I was very small, it was a place filled with a variety of people from different cultures. My mother owned a dressmaking shop which was very busy and I always enjoyed watching customers come and go, large and small ladies being fitted with outfits, rolls of fabric being rolled out and the sound of the sewing machine sort of humming in the background. At the age of nine my family moved to the countryside and I was amazed to see vegetables and fruit growing in the back garden.

Meanwhile Keith, like one or two others, takes the opportunity when answering this question, to compare a specific aspect of his own childhood with his daughter's: 'when I was your age (13), it was early to mid 70s. It was excellent because there was no MP3 players, videos or anything like that, so we made our own fun', a comment which forms an interesting counterpoint to Lily and her friends' account in their interview with me of using camcorders in playful ways to make their own videos. Technology may change the medium of play, but not playfulness *per se*.

Secondary schooling

When asked about their memories of secondary school, the interviewees are more ambivalent. It is not always clear precisely what kind of school they attended: ten refer merely to 'secondary' schools, some of which were single-sex; two attended Cornford; five say they went to a grammar school, two to a comprehensive although the system was relatively new at the time ('so it was a little bit of an experiment', as Suzanne's mother Caroline suggests). Only one specifically says she attended a private school and one went to a convent. Margaret was sent from Nigeria to a 'boarding grammar school' in Ireland. Abigail's mother, Jenny, moved between two schools:

One was a girls' grammar school for two years and that was very strict, a stern kind of place, I wasn't very happy there. Then I went to a comprehensive school, it was mixed and was great fun and I really enjoyed having boys in the class. I was encouraged to be a reader there, particularly when I did my O level English Literature – we had a brilliant teacher.

It seems, therefore, that they not only went to day schools of varying kinds but also had mixed experiences. As Keith explains, 'I didn't find [secondary school] very good, erm, I was probably a bit undecided of what I wanted to do when I left school and er, at that time there wasn't much emphasis on helping school leavers. The teachers weren't much help either'. Likewise, Jessica's father, James, found school disappointing: 'I wasn't encouraged at all at my secondary school; I was at an all boys grammar school that I didn't particularly like. I didn't particularly enjoy it'. Christine says, 'My memories of school are not of the learning but of the socialising. Our school was well known for being one of the worse schools in the county'. By contrast, others have fond memories of their schools. Lee's father, Matt, says 'Secondary school was a great experience preparing me for the real world and it help[ed] as I had a very inspirational teacher as well'. The only other parents to comment specifically on the quality of the teaching are Jenny whose 'brilliant' English Literature 'O' level teacher has already been referred to above and Tony who was influenced as a reader by his English teacher, remembering in particular studying John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* with him.

Memories of being encouraged to read at secondary school are generally mixed. A few respondents are positive. Elizabeth's mother, Amanda, recalls at her grammar school: 'we were given free periods where you were expected to go to the library choose a book and read it in the library'. Many, however, say they have no memory of any encouragement. Instead, they remember practicalities. Angela, Steve's mother, was 'forced to read out loud in front of the class, which made some people stutter and which I hated' and Siobhan says that she, too, 'hated it when the class read aloud because it was often slow and painful' though she did enjoy discussing the book afterwards.

Xavier's mother, Catherine, reports very positively on her experience and continuing with her study of English into the sixth form:

At sixteen doing an English A level I read Tomas Hardy's "Return of the Native". This then led me to read the rest of his books and then when I was seventeen me and three friends went on a holiday in Dorset, where we went to see Hardy's cottage at Stinsford.

It contrasts starkly with Christine's very negative experience of English at O Level:

I do not remember being encouraged to develop as a reader apart from when I took English Literature which I did not enjoy and thought many of the questions asked in relation to the texts I read like *Midsummer Nights Dream*, *Man For All Seasons* and *A Day of the Triffids* were pointless. I struggled with the work given in relation to the reading that we were supposed to read. My experience of this as an 'O' level subject put me off reading until I left school.

Despite the adults' mixed memories of school reading, when asked how they would describe themselves currently as readers almost all of them indicate that they do like reading: James, Jenny and Keith for example describe themselves as avid or voracious; Margaret and Maria say they enjoy it; Catherine and Christine are amongst several who define themselves as people who read as much as time permits but do not have as much time as they would ideally like; yet another group reply in terms of being fast, slow, or confident. All responses, however, indicate they think reading is important. Only one or two do not appear to class it as a hobby or interest, for example Sam's mother, Tracey, who reads a lot of trade magazines for work but tends not to read for pleasure.

Reading for work and interest

The interview schedule did not include a direct question about employment, but information about jobs or line of work sometimes emerges as part of the discussion, especially when the adults are asked about reading in connection with work, hobbies or interests. Here, as elsewhere, the responses are diverse but illuminating. For some, reading itself is a hobby, in Catherine's case her main one, chiming well with her work as a teaching assistant with infants. Jenny counts it as one of her main hobbies, too, especially the reading group which she and friends have set up. Others describe how reading fuels their interests. Ahmet says:

I do like to read history and psychology and also I am very interested in how different cultures view the problems in today's world and why they think terrorism is on such a high scale. I like to think I can try to

understand it from their perspective and I could be inspired by the way some of these different cultures think.

Some, but not all, mention reading linked with particular pastimes such as sport, photography, riding and cookery. Others say they read in connection with their hobbies without specifying what they are. Two interviewees, Christine and Audrey, mention reading to acquire an Open University degree although Audrey admits, 'I think I read too much and at the end of it, I lost the will to read, for about 5 years. And then I went back to reading books and now I can't stop'.

Many of the adults, though, are clear about the importance of reading in their line of work, perhaps sensing an opportunity to emphasise for their children the future value and relevance of their development as readers. Again, several do not name their particular job, but they still make a clear statement about reading as being central to it, for example reading clients' documents or dealing with correspondence and other general office work. Others are more specific, stressing the importance of reading in their work as a nurse, designer, advertising copywriter, travel agent, teacher, publisher and an airline pilot.

Some historical elements of habitual and committed reading

Having offered a glimpse of the parents' and grandparents' biographical details, some of their personal memories about where they grew up, their schooling and their attitudes to reading, I next explore the responses triggered by questions encouraging slightly more distanced recollections with the potential for broader historical analysis. One such question which proved to be particularly interesting was about whether anyone read to them when they were younger. Superficially, it seemed geared simply to elicit personal memories; however, it also frequently generated more widely-considered, value-laden answers than that. Five people, for example, reply that they cannot remember anyone reading aloud to them but add that they feel sure someone must have done. Everyone else is able to recall being read to but their answers, however, are also historically interesting in terms of who it was that did the reading and the fact that it was habitual. Amanda is one of three who remembers being read to by her grandparents: 'my grandparents [or] anybody who was visiting the house would have a book thrust upon them and asked to read, it happened a lot'. When referring to their parents reading to them, many of them specifically mention whether it was their mother or father who did

the reading and it is worth noting that almost as many say it was their fathers as their mothers. The phrasing they use to describe their memories conveys a sense of the habitual. Raymond's mother, Diane, recalls 'my dad read to me most nights of the week. Quite a lot of the time he made up stories' whilst Olivia says that her father 'always read to me when I was ill, I remember. And sometimes he'd read to us on a Sunday as well'. Only Siobhan says she disliked being read to; she preferred to read herself, even though she later enjoyed reading to her own children. More detail is sometimes offered such as Margaret recalling that when she was growing up in Nigeria 'my mum used to read Just So Stories by Rudyard Kipling to me. I then read things like 101 Dalmatians to my parents and our houseboy'. Jenny's mother and father both read to her. She remembers two things in particular: 'being read Rupert Bear annuals at night time, by my Dad. He used to read the rhyming couplets and we enjoyed those and I did the same for my children'; and 'When my Dad went away on business, he would record stories on an old-fashioned reel to reel tape recorder, for me and my brother to listen to, so we heard stories like that as well'. If these data are set alongside data from the collages, we see that reading aloud with children seems amongst this group of families to be an almost universal practice or at least an aspiration. The question and its various responses also offer students a brief insight into the practice from a historical perspective, as something that was happening when their parents were children that has been replicated in their own childhood experiences. It allows them a glimpse that they may or may not have had previously of their grandparents (and in three cases, their great-grandparents) engaging in this particular aspect of parenting. The fact that, for the most part, the practice is not gender specific, being shared even two generations ago by mothers *and* fathers, is an additional point of illumination.

Early influences

Another question which prompts memories of the adults' own parents and grandparents is 'When you were young, who influenced you most as a reader or did you just discover things to read for yourself?' Although friends are mentioned by four respondents, teachers and schools likewise, parents and grandparents feature much more strongly, often with reasons for their influence. Zara's mother, Kate, thinks that the chief influence may have been her grandfather 'who told me about how wonderful books were. He left school when he was young and

educated himself by reading good literature'. Like several others, Margaret feels it was her parents who influenced her 'since they were keen readers'; Kirsty's grandmother, Betty, makes a similar point about shared reading interests: 'I got into old romantic books, modern romance, wartime, reading of women ... those kinda books really. My mum read those books before me so my mum is what influenced me reading'. As well as preferences spanning across generations, another source of parents' influence is the provision of books, especially as gifts for birthdays and Christmas. James has a particularly vivid memory: 'the highlight of any Christmas morning was unpacking and opening the presents from my Father, which was usually a pack of twelve books, wrapped in brown paper, with my name on it when we were all children we used to find that perhaps the most exciting part of Christmas'.

At least half the respondents enjoy discovering things to read for themselves, though. Sometimes this is as well as being given reading matter by other people, sometimes not. Amanda and Keith's respective responses represent these extremes. Amanda clearly had a range of options:

I was always bought books to read or given books to read but I think an awful lot of it I discovered myself erm ... the picture of Matilda springs to mind traipsing off to the library to find books on different information but it was never a problem whatever I got was always agreed to be appropriate for me to read so it was never as if I was reading stuff that I shouldn't have been.

Keith, meanwhile, says:

I think I just discovered things for myself. Although I always have been a voracious reader, my parents have not and my sister was not. So, er, I just enjoyed reading and finding things for myself. It turned out that I had more books than anyone else in my family!

These contrasting responses are evidence that the trajectories of keen readers like Keith do not always originate in surroundings where others read a lot, thus complicating correlations between family or school background and developing the habit of reading.

Libraries and books

It is also interesting to note the powerful influence of libraries in the interviewees' responses, especially compared with the apparently low appeal of libraries for

their children and grandchildren. Amanda mentions the library explicitly here as one of several options available to her. For Keith, however, the library plays a central role. He tells Lily that there was a library in the village where he grew up so he used to go there to get books out. More crucial was the fortuitous fact of where his daily registration at school took place:

I actually got my love of reading from the fact that my tutor, well my tutor room, was the school library, so we had access to the books, well, any books we wanted to, so I was a very voracious reader at an early age; fact/fiction, you name it really.

For the majority of others, libraries formed part of the routine associated with reading. Steph, like many, remembers getting reading material 'from the library, in the village, we used to go every week with my dad, and get books out'. For Amanda, 'it was a Saturday morning ritual to visit and change our books, it was something I looked forward to and relished'. Audrey and Catherine both remember the library vividly. For Audrey, the supply of books fed her appetite for reading: 'I was an avid reader and I would go to the library in holiday times [every] week and I'd bring home about four, three, I think it was three books we were allowed and I'd read them, go back and get some more books', whilst Catherine tells Xavier, 'My most vivid memory is spending ages in the library choosing books ... My parents enjoyed reading and used the library too'. Here, choice and independence are critical, as they are for Christine who enjoyed the freedom to choose 'anything that I liked when I was old enough to go to the library by myself'. Although for many getting books from the library was valuable since there was little spare money to buy them, the availability of libraries was equally important in fostering the agency young readers felt able to exercise within them.

Any books the adults did own were obviously precious to them, as evidenced in their answers to the question 'Have you still got any of your books, magazines or comics from your childhood? If so, why have you kept them?' Their reasons for keeping them fall into several broad categories. In some instances, it is because the books have been passed down to them or received as gifts. James says 'the books I've got, I kept because I inherited them from my parents, and I kept them as such because I will read them maybe again one day in my older age'. Siobhan meanwhile has already handed some of hers on to her daughter 'because I enjoyed

the stories, or because they came from grandparents and parents'. Indeed, Siobhan's daughter, Corinne, later wrote a series of reading journal entries about one of them – Louise Montgomery's *The Story Girl*. Matt, Simon and Ahmet all feel the books might help their children understand their past, as Matt puts it 'so my children can experience what it was like to read in my time'. The most commonly given reason, though, is that they are treasured possessions, because they are remembered, as Margaret says, as being 'such lovely books, I wanted to read them to my children'. Suzanne's mother, Caroline, says she has kept her Secret Seven books, Rupert Bear annuals and old wildlife books 'because they were special to me, sentimental value and that'. For Steph, they hold 'fond memories' and for Diane 'I suppose they are a bit like an old friend really'. All these adults are conveying to their children and grandchildren a combination of the ongoing affection they feel towards these books and, in many cases, a sense that the feelings as much as the books themselves are a form of inheritance to be passed on to their children. Young people themselves are often avid collectors of books and magazines, frequently re-reading them. Although their collections are precious to them right now, the adults' comments may signal to them that this could continue to be the case long into the future. Despite the intensity of feeling involved, the adults mostly reply to this particular question in a form of shorthand, using phrases such as 'sentimental value'; Amanda, however, offers a more detailed explanation. The language in which her answer is couched – 'not quite sure'; 'probably'; 'I think' – suggests she may be reflecting on this point for the first time:

I don't have any personally but I, I'm sure that my mum's got loads erm ... not quite sure why she kept them, probably the same reason as why I kept a lot of the books from when you were younger, Kipper and er things like that, The Mousehole Cat because they were stories that I knew you enjoyed and I enjoyed reading them with you and I think it gives that, that shared enjoyment of a special kind and things you want to keep.

Her characterisation of the books as representative of 'shared enjoyment' offers a more precise reason as to why books are kept and what 'sentimental' in this instance might mean. Shared enjoyment is a point I return to later in the chapter since other evidence from the data suggests it may be an important strand in the construction of habitual and committed reading.

Some of the adults say they do not have enough space to keep old books. However, they retain powerful memories of reading from their younger days. Keith recalls the impact of reading John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me* which was one of his favourite books aged fourteen:

I had it until I was about 35, and then I must have lost it during one of our moves. So I brought it again about three years ago. It is a very interesting book behind the segregation of the blacks and the white in the 60s in America.

Diane used to keep her books and 'stock them up but they started to take up too much space and I handed them to friends'. However, from some of her other answers in the interview, it is clear that they were important to Diane and her parents:

I remember buying books aged nine or ten. I used to go out with my mum, and I used to buy a book a month from my series and that was a big event for me. We didn't have that many books, we had a few Atlases and things like that which was what my dad used to read ... My mother read all the time you never saw my mother in the evenings without a book by her side.

With even greater feeling, Diane explains to Raymond another way in which her childhood reading has remained with her, namely in her memories of what was probably Malcolm Saville's Lone Pine series which she tells him she absolutely adored:

I still think about it sometimes, it was almost like the secret seven, it was about a group of children that went on holiday together around the lay mind [Long Mynd] in wales and down on the south coast. And I often think about those stories because they really conjured up the whole place and the whole environment. These places which I've never been to in my life but I bet you if I went there I could tell you every thing about it.

The intensity of this remembered imaginary place is quite as vivid as Woolf's reading of *Jane Eyre* mentioned earlier in Chapter 2. The memories, if not the actual books themselves, are for Diane what form the trajectory of her childhood reading, travelling with her over the years, still a significant element of her readership. Her vivid articulation of these reading memories may suggest to Raymond something of what he, too, can expect to carry forward with him from any of his own equally powerful reading experiences.

The experience of absorption

As has already been mentioned in Chapter 6, one of the questions asked in both the group interviews and the parent/grandparent interviews requires people to try and describe what it is like when they become completely absorbed in their reading. It is, of course, a very difficult experience to put into words, not least because the notion of being absorbed presupposes shutting off certain other elements of the conscious mind. In *The child that books built*, his memoir of childhood and reading, Francis Spufford uses an engineering metaphor to capture the experience:

As my concentration on the story in my hands took hold, all sounds faded away. My ears closed. I didn't imagine the process of the cut-off like a shutter dropping, or as the narrowing of the pink canals leading inside, each waxy cartilaginous passage iris-ing tight like some deft alien doorway in *Star Trek*. It seemed more hydraulic than that. Deep in the mysterious ductwork an adjustment had taken place with the least possible actual movement, an adjustment chiefly of pressure. There was an airlock in there. It sealed to the outside so that it could open to the inside. The silence that fell on the noises of people and traffic and dogs allowed an inner door to open to the book's data, its script of sound (Spufford, 2002, p. 1).

We have already seen some of the metaphors used by the students as they attempted to articulate their responses to this question. Now we can look at what the adults said and discuss the possible implications for their children and grandchildren of hearing how grown-ups perceive this same experience of adjustment. Like the students, several describe it as moving into a different world. The words 'in' or 'into' are commonly used, as if the process involves physically stepping inside another place, a reminder of why C. S. Lewis's wardrobe as the portal to Narnia is such a powerful image. For James, 'I think that it gives you an opportunity to take you to a different place and you get absorbed in what you're reading about and the content of it. I am in my own little world'. Maria says 'it transports me into a world filled with promise'. Moreover, the experience is almost hallucinatory: time and again the adults frame their response in terms of surrendering other senses. Angela says it is as if 'I go completely deaf and oblivious to what is going on around me'. Not hearing, not noticing, forgetting: viewed objectively, it sounds irresponsible adult behaviour and yet there is no sense whatsoever of guilt even when it clearly inconveniences other people. Keith tells Lily that she ought to be asking her mother what he's like when he's

absorbed in his reading. 'She shouts at me because sometimes I become so engrossed in a book that she has to ask me a question two or three times before I realise she's talking to me.' Hazel's grandmother, Irene, is the same: 'I don't hear anybody talking to me and I completely ignore the TV (and granddad!)'.

Some answers sound similar to the students', especially those which employ film metaphors. Christine describes it like 'watching a movie in your head'. For Diane it is an even more immediate experience:

I think when I'm into a story I am more or less completely into that world which its based in and its like I'm sort of like a character in the background watching whats going on and I can vividly see whats going on. I can see all the colours and imagine the terrain. I can completely see it, its because I believe your imagination is so strong no film can match it.

Equally complex are the responses where the experience is described in temporal terms: Steph says 'you tend not to realise how quickly time is going, and how many jobs you should be doing like housework and shopping, because you're so absorbed and you just want to read on and on and on'; and this is how Olivia describes it: 'Well you don't want to put it down. And it's a lovely thing to know that you can go back to that. So you have it in the back of your mind all the time when you're doing other things'.

Comparisons and contrasts across the generations

When asked to compare and contrast their own young adult reading with their children's or grandchildren's, the adults give thoughtful answers from which certain patterns begin to emerge. The question about whether they used to read much as a child and, if so, what they liked about it reveals quite a strong similarity amongst them in terms of some of the texts they recall. Their remembered childhood reading revolved for the most part around various well-known series with Enid Blyton's *Secret Seven*, *Famous Five* and *Malory Towers* having been especially popular. Other remembered favourites are *Rupert Bear* annuals, *Paddington Bear* books, and *Winnie-the-Pooh* stories. Certain titles are also mentioned by more than one person notably Arthur Ransome's *Swallows & Amazons*, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* along with Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories* and Edith Nesbit's *The Railway Children*. Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, their answers

to the question about similarities and differences between what they used to read when they were young and the sorts of things their (grand)children read now chime clearly with one another.

Steph definitely read quite a lot as a child. She recalls being read Kipling's *Just So Stories* and *The Hobbit* by her dad who used to take her every week to the library in the village. Like many of the parents and grandparents she seems to feel that the younger generation of readers has a greater choice of reading material available to them. She introduces a notion shared by others in the research, about growth in the teenage book market since she was young:

When I was your age I think I would have read far more children's books whereas I think you're reading more adult books, and there's a lot more books for teenagers and young adults but when I was young I think it was either children's books or adult. I also think nowadays the books are a lot more explicit and graphic, basically a lot more adult in contrast.

Audrey agrees: 'there wasn't the range of books for teenagers that there are now'. Today's young readers still enjoy the same Enid Blyton books as their parents and grandparents, and sometimes the same comics too. As Nathan mentions in the group interview, 'My granddad used to read the *Dandy* and the *Beano* and stuff like that ... in the war and then he used to like, whenever he went out he thought "Hmm, maybe [Nathan] might like this" so I was given the *Dandy* first and I liked it and then he gave me the *Beano* ... Just whenever he really went into town'. However, the same cannot be said of some of the social realist magazines produced for young people. Irene mentions that she used to read a lot of comics such as the *School Friend* and *Girls' Crystal* which bear little or no relation – either in substance or values – to magazines like *Bliss*, *Shout* or *Mizz* enjoyed by young readers now.

Amanda tells Elizabeth that as a child reading for her was her way of escaping:

I could get away from what was normal and mundane or I could be the characters I, I always wanted to be what they were, do what they were doing go where they've been erm ... I was always keen to go exploring and I wanted something well, exciting ... it showed me how dull it was where I lived (laughs) which I suppose isn't a good thing ... My most favourite type of reading was things like the Malory

Towers or the secret Seven, Famous Five all the escape type things that got you away from normal real life.

She goes on to suggest that the idea of reading as a form of escape still pertains for young people today, but with very different styles of writing and writers (citing Louise Rennison and Scott Westerfield as examples), a trend she attributes to 'society being so different so the content of books are different'. Maria thinks that societal differences are particularly relevant to the way young women are represented in fiction: 'we have seen the development of women as heroines and matters are discussed nowadays that were considered socially unacceptable when I was your age'. Jenny puts the point slightly differently, but makes the same point as Steph about the teenage book market:

I think you read a lot more of what I would call "girly" books, you know teenage girl books. When I was a child there weren't books aimed at the teenage market. There were adult books and children's books, so nothing much in between.

Keith is another of the adults who cites comics as one of the main differences in reading matter between his generation and his daughter's, though he also appears to see gender as another difference:

I especially liked Victor, which is like a war comic; then I got into Commando, which is again war stories. Erm, so that raised my interest in war and planes in the 1st and 2nd world war. From then on, I brought factual books on the war. Mostly the 2nd world war regarding the eastern campaign ... I don't know. I think we've talked in the past like at an early age I read you fairy tales whereas my dad probably read me war stories or stories for boys! Now you are changing your view about things that you like. You are quite into the war stories like Anne Frank's Diary. I was into war like I told you a few times but in a different way. I liked the stories about the fighting and flying.

As far as James is concerned, his particular enthusiasm was 'mountaineering and climbing and fiction and non-fiction about children living in or around mountains ... My most favourite reading material was at probably thirteen or fourteen were books by an author called John Buchan which was very much about Scotland and poaching'. He therefore does not think there are many similarities between his own childhood preferences and his daughter's. As he tells her, 'I think that you (and I'm only guessing this really) tend to read more fantasy type books which I personally never really liked, apart from the Mervyn Peake trilogy which is *Titus Groan*, *Titus Alone* and *Gormenghast*. Brilliant!' Later, when Jessica specifically

asks him to name his favourite childhood book he tells her it is '*Kami the Sherpa*. I can't remember who it was by'. It was, in fact, by Frank Showell Styles and it was in a genre prevalent during the middle decades of the twentieth century, sometimes referred to as *camping and tramping* fiction (Watson, 2000; 2001). Watson argues that this kind of story developed when series fiction writers moved away from setting their work in schools during term-time and turned their attention to children's exploits during the holidays. The genre was peculiarly British and 'the narrative was mostly devoted to the excitements of hiking, exploring, boating, map-reading and the practicalities of camping' (Watson, 2001, p. 124). Watson accounts for the popularity of the genre in a number of ways including the then current enthusiasm for scouting and guiding coupled with an elegiac attitude on the part of adult writers towards what they perceived to be a fast-disappearing pastoral, idealised English countryside (Watson, 2000). Although, therefore, James and Jessica do not seem to have a great deal in common in terms of their reading matter, they both nevertheless enjoy series fiction (as we know from Jessica's reading of the whole Harry Potter series at once), and appreciate one another's preferences as readers.

The habit of reading aloud

Towards the end of the interviews, the students asked their parent or grandparent directly how they thought they had influenced them as readers. Here, too, the data analysis shows several areas of commonality. By far the largest is the adults' belief in the importance of having been read to themselves and of habitually reading to their children or grandchildren. Keith's assumption that his parents must have read to him, even though he cannot remember, suggests the value being placed on it: 'they will have done sometime! I can remember my dad saying he did. However, I personally can't remember!' As we have already seen, many of the students likewise think that being read aloud to is a reason for their having become habitual, committed readers. However, plenty of young people (as Margaret has already noted) are read to yet lose their motivation for reading. What is interesting about one or two of these responses is that they take the issue a little further; they add a comment which makes explicit something about their values in relation to this practice. Ahmet, for example, tells Mehmet:

When you were young I used to read you books and I made sure you understood what I was reading to you. Also I used to make games to

make sure you absorbed what I was reading you ... when you started reading I loved listening to you read.

So, reading aloud was not merely a duty or a routine. Ahmet clearly realised that his son needed to understand the reading, needed to see that the process was about meaning-making, not merely decoding. But he also says that he himself *enjoyed* hearing Mehmet read, 'loved' listening to him. Siobhan's reminiscence is likewise affective: in a brief note in the interview booklet she writes that as a child she hated being read to and preferred to read books to herself, but after she had children 'found I enjoyed reading to them and also listening to my husband reading to them'. In her family, like others within this study, there seems to be a strong sense of reading as a form of shared enjoyment and communal activity. Jenny is not only explicit about enjoying reading to her children but also makes a tentative link between that and her daughter Abigail's commitment to reading: 'I always read to you since you were really tiny and that was a lovely, pleasurable thing to do with both of you, so I hope that gave you an interest'. In Margaret Clark's well-known study of much younger children, *Young Fluent Readers* (Clark, 1976), she is careful to demonstrate that the relationship between parents and children who are fluent readers at an early age is manifestly not one of cause and effect, not least because there are often other children in the family who are not equally fluent readers at the same age. However, one factor which she notes as particularly interesting, on the basis of her observation of the parents and children when she meets them, plus the evidence from the data she collects, is that the parents enjoy the company of their children and, furthermore, see their children as 'stimulating companions' (*ibid.*, p. 42). There seems to be a point of connection between parents – both in her study and in this present one – who view reading together as not merely an educative duty but a form of social companionship, of interrelationship, with something to be gained by both participants.

Three parents make different, but equally interesting comments about their perceived influence on their children's reading. Here, though, the emphasis is on cultural values enduring over time. The word 'always' is significant. Kate, Zara's mother, puts it simply: 'You have always seen that Dad and I like to read for pleasure and for work'. Keith tells Lily something similar: 'I think you have grown up knowing that your mother and I have always read ... I think that because you have seen books everywhere in our house, whichever room, even the

smallest room, you have always known we've been reading books'. It is interesting to note that a number of the class (Zara, Lily, Floella and Freya for example) said in the group interview that they were close friends and therefore as well as what they see and experience in relation to books and reading in their own homes, there is the potential influence of what they see and experience in each other's. What is also interesting about these parents' comments is that they are not judgmental. Kate simply states what she presumes Zara already knows; she does not tell her what to think about it. Likewise, Keith's response is phrased as a tentative thought affirmed however by his statement that Lily's mother and he have 'always read', that there are 'books everywhere' and that, therefore, she has 'always known' the central importance of reading to her parents.

Amanda, here as elsewhere, mulls over the point in depth:

I would hope that, that from a very early age you saw people around you reading, you had a love and enjoyment of a book there was erm as far as I can remember never a time when you would of produced a book and somebody said no I don't have time to do that for you erm ... there was always time for books and often it would take erm, take precedence over all sorts of things like cleaning the house and ironing, I would always rather read you a book than do any of that! (laughs) and erm ... I've always been very passionate about buying books as well um and have encouraged relatives to give you book tokens and things and, and to share your love of reading, wanting to listen to you, to read. So yea, hopefully my influence has been quite strong.

If Amanda's comments are analysed from a historical perspective, it quickly becomes clear that she is not simply saying that because she reads (and used to read) a lot therefore her daughter reads a lot as well. Instead, she provides evidence of her own and her daughter's trajectories jostling alongside one another, in the past as well as now: 'from a very early age ... as far as I can remember... always ... often ... always ... always'. When Elizabeth produces a book her mother willingly abandons the housework to read to her. Here, too, there is an echo of Clark's study of young fluent readers whose parents likewise seem willing to take part in play with their children 'even at the expense of delaying other activities' (*ibid.*, p. 43). Elizabeth learns a culture of reading from seeing others read and their making time to read with her. She hears her mother say she has always bought books not out of a sense of duty but of passion. Relatives were encouraged to give Elizabeth book tokens enabling her to participate in shopping

for books and making choices for herself. Interestingly, therefore, even when answering a question about her own influence, Amanda paints a picture of Elizabeth as actively shaping her own trajectory in a highly valued culture of reading, not passively having it imposed upon her.

Interviewees' concluding thoughts

To conclude their interviews, most of the students asked the adults a very open-ended question namely 'Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience of reading?' It is instructive to consider what is included in their replies. As one of the parents who believes her daughter does not read very much any more, Margaret acknowledges that not everyone will be keen on reading, thus not appearing too judgmental about Louisa's current lack of enthusiasm; nevertheless, she adds that it is a pity when that is the case since she believes reading to be not only important but fulfilling. These twin beliefs – in the importance of reading and the fulfilment it can bestow – largely chime with those held by all the others in the study who enjoy reading. Siobhan, looking ahead, states simply that reading 'will always be a pleasure and I am still exploring new things'. Steph returns to thinking further about the benefits of being in a reading group and how encountering other people's reading trajectories 'opens you up to lots of different types of book that you might not normally read' as well as enabling you to discover other people's views on aspects of fiction such as character, something she finds very interesting. Maria addresses the importance of reading explicitly in her concluding comments:

I think that everyone should have access to books and that it is important to have books in the home as well as in schools and library's. Often if books are laying about then children will pick them up and they should be treated as an important part of everyday life.

As we have seen in several of their responses, many of the adults share the view that access to books is very important. Interestingly, Maria's comment implies the value of having books around so that 'children will pick them up' actively and voluntarily rather than being compelled. The importance of young readers' sense of agency is an attitude shared by other adults, though for the most part expressed implicitly. However, when Andie follows it up with a subsidiary question, 'So do you not think enough people encourage their children to read?', Maria articulates an additional and subtle view about the way in which cultural values – in this

case, the importance of books and reading – are passed from one generation to the next (or not, as the case may be):

I think other people choose to spend the money on other things rather than books because they don't understand their full value because perhaps they haven't been taught to appreciate books themselves so many children miss out.

Interestingly, it is a view that marries directly with Andie's opening statement in her collage that her mother's love of books has been passed on to her.

Ahmet's very positive concluding comment articulates three further reasons why reading is important:

I just want to say that reading gives you a stronger mind and that will gain you respect. Knowledge is power. Thanks!

His trio of values – strength of mind, respect and power – is interesting for Mehmet to reflect on, although his own ideas about reading, as articulated in the group interview, suggest he does not yet fully share his father's positive view.

James replies to the same question very differently, reflecting on his own trajectory as a reader from his late teens to the present day:

I think that I tend to get a bit, sort of, obsessed with certain subjects like for instance; I read most of the Thomas Hardy novels when I was in my late teens. I spent a lot of time reading about particularly about Nazis and political history which I found probably one of the most interesting features of non-fiction that I have ever read. These days I read a mixture of just about anything and everything, irrespective of what it is. I don't tend to like biographies, or auto-biographies. I tend to read a lot of newspapers and a lot of newspaper articles so I like politics and current affairs. I have liked contemporary fiction but they are very few and far between. I prefer the old classics like 'The Woman in White' by Wilkie Collins and 'War and Peace' by Leo Tolstoy and some by Fyodor [Dostoevsky]. And I also like the occasional topical one like 'Dead Man Walking' by Helen Prejean which was as a result of a film that I watched with the same name and that's been one of the most inspirational and thought-provoking books that I have ever read because it contains both politics, religion, emotions, and it makes me think quite deeply about things that I have never really thought about before particularly religion and the role it plays in particularly things like capital punishment.

His eclectic list perhaps signals to Jessica the way adult tastes, like young people's, can be diverse and change over time. Simultaneously, he articulates what appear to be a number of core functions he attributes to reading, functions that combine Margaret's notions of importance and fulfilment: feelings of inspiration and the provocation to think, aesthetic responses as well as knowledge about religion, politics, history.

Amanda is another person whose concluding thoughts addressed to her daughter refer to different reading trajectories and the social encounters they enable: 'I just hope that, my love of reading is extended to you and perhaps in the future if you decide to have a family of your own then you can encourage them to read'. Interestingly, in the light of Elizabeth's reticence in the group interview, Amanda confirms the view that her daughter is an avid reader, looking forward to Elizabeth's future as well as back to her own past:

... you read so much um I don't know if I ever read quite as much as you I probably did I often shut myself off for hours at a time um and would take a book over the field with me and lie in the trees, we lived so close to a wooded area, take a tent and I would sit in a tent for 2 days and read, and then go back home again (laughs) and, and that to me was just pleasurable, I loved doing it.

Amanda's comment suggests that the importance of reading, for her as for Margaret, is its capacity to be fulfilling. Jenny agrees, finding an analogy in cooking rather than reminiscing about the past, using the closing moments of the interview to look to the future.

... it's such a fantastic pastime and skill. It's like cooking, you will never make all the recipes available and you will never read all the books available. There is always something out there to read and that's really exciting. I really enjoy reading and I wish I had more time to do it.

What Lily learns from Keith's final answer is affirmation that his own role as a reader is available as an inheritance for his daughter:

I read a lot, you read a lot, and it is nice that your mother and I have passed our love of reading down to you and your sister. It is good that you can just pick up a book, magazine, and poem and enjoy it.

Evidence that he himself is a habitual and committed reader is everywhere apparent in his responses. 'I read every night, even if it is when I come in from

flying at 3AM,' he tells Lily. His trajectory has included different enthusiasms at different stages. At one time, he says, 'I liked [reading about] the war, but there was also a time when I got really into Thomas Hardy; *Far from the Madding Crowd* is one of my favourites'. He has always loved poetry, too: he has a book of poems, one for each day of the year which he enjoys; he is also passionate about Christina Rossetti's work. Moving back and forth between past and present, he continues:

I am into the author Christian Jacq who is a French author on fiction, although he does write fact as well. Now that I am reading his books, it has spurred my interest in Egyptology. So, now I go down to the library and get books out on Egyptology. Also, when I was a young lad, I used to read books by a German author called Sven Hassel about the 2nd world war, and again that spurred my interest in the war. Today I still have an interest in the Civil War campaign.

Lily, like many others in her class as a result of these interviews, has much to reflect on from what her father says; whether or not she is interested in predicting how her own future trajectory might be shaped, she has a secure sense from her father of what sorts of shifts and changes she might expect.

Repetition and recollection

The data from students' interviews with parents and grandparents can, very broadly, be characterised in part as rehearsed, individual memories of the kind which have contributed to the readers the adults have become. These memories, although in Schwartz's terms socially shaped (Schwartz, 1999), are also highly individual and difficult to use as a basis for generalisation since each person's experiences are so specific. The recollections which were also invited by some of the other questions, however, requiring the interviewees to adopt a more critical and distanced stance, offer data more susceptible to historical analysis as distinct from personal interpretation. My argument, in the context of this research, is of the value of both these strands to which the historical perspective as a whole gives rise. The first, the personal, is potentially valuable to each individual student since it forms an integral part of the history of their own reading trajectory. However, the second, the wider historical view, is potentially valuable to all students (and, indeed, their teachers), since it offers a glimpse of the spaces within which each person's reading trajectory encounters other people's and hence affords awareness of similarities and differences between them and their shifting fortunes over time.

It enables students to become more aware of their own readership as a continuum, dynamic and capable of transformation, not static and predetermined. These are arguments to which I return in the final chapter of the thesis. Before that, however, in Chapter 8, I discuss my analysis of the final of the four sets of data – the reading journals.

8 READING JOURNALS: A CULTURAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Analysing the data from a cultural theoretical perspective

This final chapter of the four devoted to data analysis focuses on the reading journals students were asked to keep during their last few weeks in Year 9, analysing them in particular from a cultural theoretical perspective. I have already outlined the practicalities of designing and carrying out the task in Chapter 4. I now turn my attention to analysis and interpretation of the journals themselves. In my concluding chapter of the thesis, Chapter 9, I will then discuss the contribution the data analysis makes to the findings from the other three methods and consider whether and how they make a difference to the way in which young readers and their readership may be constructed.

Affordances of reading journals

A key reason for using reading journals within English teaching is that one of their stated purposes is for readers to articulate their responses to a particular text in writing (and possibly visual forms) during the process of reading the text rather than after they have finished. Of course, it is impossible physically to read and write simultaneously and therefore readers' written thoughts and reflections always, in practical terms, come after the event. In pedagogical terms, however, the aim of reading journal writing is very different to the aims of a great deal of other classroom writing about reading. Whereas customarily students are required to produce considered and well-informed discussion, in reading journals they are specifically asked to engage actively with provisional ideas, unfolding structures, developing plots, evolving characterisation, sometimes adapting techniques such as those advocated over thirty years ago in Lunzer and Gardner's 'Effective Use of Reading' research (Lunzer and Gardner, 1979). These techniques which came to be known as *directed activities related to texts* (DARTs) (Lunzer, 1984), although originally intended for use amongst groups rather than by individuals, nevertheless sit comfortably with reading theories informing this research in that they both position and acknowledge students as active, dynamic readers, interpreters and critics, encouraging them to make available for scrutiny – by themselves first and foremost – the reading being created by the transaction between reader and text. The nature of a reading journal marries with a conception

of reading as an event in time, making explicit how the reader's responses evolve as the narrative proceeds. In addition, each student's journal entries have the potential to inform subsequent class discussion about different readers' critical interpretations of texts. These pedagogical strengths of reading journals are closely aligned with their potential strengths as research data as well.

The potential of reading journals for research

In the context of research, reading journals may be construed as an attempt to verbalise what we might call 'inner reading' (evoking Vygotsky's concept of 'inner speech'), that is, reading for oneself which requires marshalling a range of resources to make the text mean something. In reading journals, this meaning is transformed into 'outer reading', not via outer speech but via writing (and sometimes drawing), albeit for oneself in the first instance. The written form of journals renders the data readily subject to analysis. Furthermore, since the journals are completed individually, often privately, they allow a different kind of freedom for comments than might be ventured in face-to-face conversation or online social networking sites such as instant messaging with the prospect of immediate confirmation or rebuttal, though the writer's sense of who will ultimately read and respond to them may still act as either an encouragement or a constraint. For the time being, however, the writer can pursue a line of thought without interruption, although the extent to which the writing then remains monologic rather than becoming dialogic – acknowledging, following Bakhtin, the ultimately dialogic nature of all utterances (Bakhtin, 1981) – remains an interesting question. The researcher, therefore, may be able to study the journals as a source of relatively idiosyncratic evidence of how readers perceive a text, engage with its substantive matter and enact the processes of reading it.

Culturally, too, journals offer interesting evidence of the wide range of values which readers draw on to construct the meaning they make from their reading. These values may be inscribed in the texts they read, the way they write about them, the contexts within which they read and write, their perceptions of who the audience is, the connections they make with other areas of knowledge such as film or sport, and their social or institutional networks of family, friends, teachers, peers.

Limitations of reading journals in research

However, a practical limitation of reading journals as research evidence is the writer's motivation, capacity and stamina for writing them. The journal writing guidance I wrote for the students (Appendix 5) invited them to respond individually and tentatively to a book of their own choice. This invitation, coupled with the relatively informal classroom conditions for reading (for example, the classroom was not necessarily silent and students were allowed to listen to their own music on iPods whilst reading), established a very varied stance towards the writing, ranging from Freya's serious attempt to convey her thoughts about reading Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* to Elizabeth's somewhat breathless, chatty record of reading various young spy novels or humorous teen diaries, to Suzanne's Nick Sharratt-inspired picture-story-cum-instant-messaging style response to Jacqueline Wilson's *Girls in Love* (Figure 8.1).

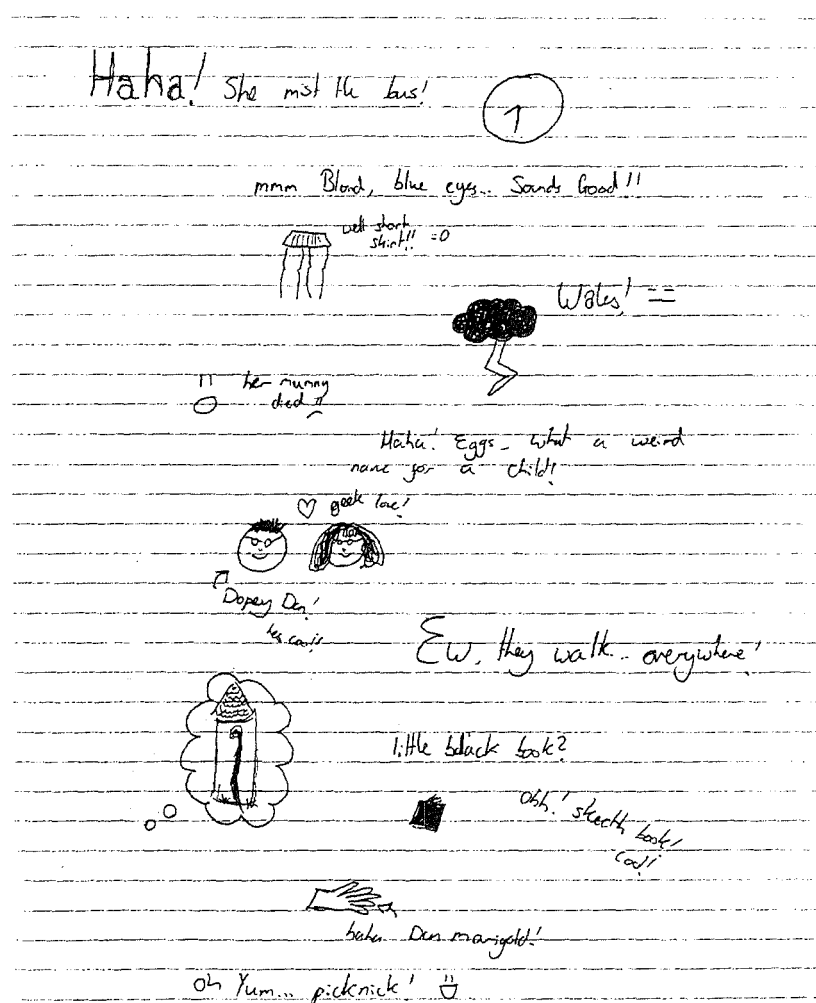


Figure 8.1

A page from Suzanne's reading journal

Another point to remember about the use of journal writing in this particular project is that for reasons already explained I did not ask Rosa to respond to the journals whilst they were being written. When as a teacher myself I encouraged journal writing in English lessons, I would read and respond to the students' entries on a regular basis, taking the opportunity not only to discover more for myself about their unfolding thoughts and feelings, but also write comments which might affect, even direct, students' subsequent entries. The points I chose to pick up on would signal to the students what I, as their teacher, found interesting or wanted to stress: it was a form of dialogic teaching in which I positioned myself as on the one hand a co-respondent, genuinely interested in students' reading of a particular book and on the other hand a reader with different experiences to theirs, using journal writing to prompt students to consider adopting alternative perspectives, and hence, perhaps, in keeping with a desire to increase their 'textual power', a more interpretive or critical stance than they otherwise might. The fact that Rosa did not do that was a potential advantage for the research in that the students did not know until after they had completed all their entries how they might be perceived by anyone reading them. Arguably, they were therefore freer to use the journals in their preferred ways for a longer period of time. On the other hand, it also meant that students who tended to use the journals for plot summaries (in themselves interesting, but only one of a range of possible articulations) were not provoked into other aspects of what Rosa explicitly referred to with the group as 'active reading'. The data may not therefore represent some aspects of their reading – the critical, in particular – as forthrightly as others. Furthermore, those who did not ultimately hand in a journal at all may have lost momentum as a result of not receiving more immediate feedback. Since the journals were also the final part of the data collection, the comments I wrote back to the students when I returned their work to them did not inform any further part of the project.

Making independent choices: a precarious business

Twenty-three members of the class completed journals and twenty-one were happy for them to be included in the research: 69% of the boys and 70% of the girls. Between them, the nine boys recorded reading ten books of which six were novels and three were autobiographies, one of rugby player Laurence Dallaglio, one the comedian Peter Kay's and the third of wrestler-turned-evangelist, Tony

Anthony. Roughly half their books were written for adult readership, half for young people. Five of the boys' ten books were left unfinished. Stuart begins Anthony Horowitz's *Snakehead* enthusiastically: 'I'm excited to start reading this book as I have read all the others in the series [six books] and I really want to carry on the story'. However, after Chapter 9 he loses interest because he finds it too 'predictable and similar to the other books'. We should not assume from these statistics that the books mentioned were the only ones being read by these boys during the period the journals were completed. Raymond, for example, records a long struggle over several weeks to finish and write about his reading of Celia Rees's *Pirates!* which he did not enjoy. From the outset he is sceptical: 'I have got a book which is supposed to be brilliant but I am not sure if it is my sort. It may be worth noticing that like my mother [Diane] I prefer fantasy books'. In his concluding journal entry he writes: 'I did not enjoy this book as much as I enjoyed a series I have just finished by David Eddings. I think this is because "Pirates" is written in a much more personal style and is over a shorter period of time so there is a lot more detail, which annoys me'. We do not know which David Eddings series he read or how many books it comprises. The journal has been completed dutifully, but Raymond has meanwhile been enjoying other reading matter entirely, free from any constraints of school-based tasks like keeping a journal.

The twelve girls recorded reading fifty books, all bar one being novels encompassing a variety of genres and a mix of adult and teenage literature. Of the fifty, twenty-five were by five authors: Stephanie Meyer (8), J. K. Rowling (7), M. C. Beaton (Agatha Raisin detective novels) (4), Anthony Horowitz (3) and Jacqueline Wilson (3). The kind of reading the girls explored on this occasion included teenage romance, comedy, fantasy, 'chicklit', autobiography, teenage spy stories, fictional diaries and social realism.

The reasons for the girls' selections are similar to the boys': for the most part they stem from parents' or friends' recommendations, or the continuation of a series. Sometimes, they borrow from Rosa's classroom collection and find themselves drawn into a book they might otherwise not read, as Lily did with James Riordan's *Sweet Clarinet* which she read whilst waiting for her copy of Stephanie Meyer's *Eclipse* to arrive:

GRRR!! I have ordered the book online but it hasn't come yet!! I hope I get it soon, otherwise I might just BURST!! I'll have to make do with one of Mrs [Banbury's] books ... grrr! I NEED TO READ SOMETHING!! Reading 'Sweet Clarinet' as a stand in! Sounds pretty good though. Story about music and wartime it sounds like.

Lily reads *Sweet Clarinet* through to the end and somewhat surprises herself by finding it very good. 'It did get a bit boring in the middle, but I carried on reading and it turned out to be amazing.' Amongst her journal entries is one which notes that Billy, the central character, is 'playing a piece I am playing for my grade 7 clarinet! How cool?!'.

On other occasions, when not forced to rise to the challenge of the new, students rely on tried and tested recommendations. Floella, for example, had talked in the small-group interview about her father recommending books to her:

Floella: ... my dad usually tries to get me to read his books 'cos he reads very interesting books about green stuff, like green issues ... biodiesel. He's obsessed with biodiesel at the moment. He's trying to make some out of algae ... So he often says 'Ooh you must read this book, it's really good' but I never do.

Even though she does not, at this stage, take up his suggestions, her comments imply that he nevertheless credits her with the capacity to share his enjoyment, giving her a sense that she could read them if she so wished and communicating a view of her potential as a reader. Instead, she takes up her mother's recommendations since they appear for the time being to resonate more with what she already enjoys. She therefore begins her journal with some writing and pencil sketches of Joanne Harris's *The Lollipop Shoes*:

I chose this book because it is the "sequel" to a book called "Chocolat" that I absolutely love. My mum found it in a bookshop and when she finished it, she told me I definitely had to read it, so I will.

The subsequent brief entries suggest that one reason she expects to enjoy it is her trust that 'the book will be very good as Joanne Harris is a very good author'. Floella's interview with her grandmother revealed that Joanne Harris was amongst Audrey's favourite novelists, too. Floella's endorsement (which therefore situates her as a reader, in this instance, alongside both her mother and grandmother), along with her knowledge of *Chocolat*, sustains her:

Part one is called "Death" which sounds a bit depressing but doesn't put me off ... There's a bit where she sees a girl in a red coat, that's quite scary because it's like "Don't Look Now". But at the same time it's ok because Vianne + Anouk always wore red coats in *Chocolat*.

She appears to enjoy adopting a more critical stance to begin to attend to the way the book is written, even though she does not extend her analysis very far:

Wow! The description in this book is amazing – "the whisper of Prada". I love that imagery ... "Dancing us to shreds against the stones". I love the way this sentence uses a beautiful word – dancing, next to a negative word – shreds. It's so powerful.

Her drawings of characters such as Annie or Yanne Charbonneau and ideas from the novel that have captured her attention (a box of macaroons; someone's blue grey eyes; impractical shoes) are another means of focusing on what the novelist does as well as what the novel means to her. She raises questions about narrative viewpoint or gaps the author leaves in the text and makes connections between some of the commentary and her own life:

It says you can tell a lot about someone from their shoes, I wonder what mine say about me!

Abigail likewise takes up a deliberately critical stance towards her reading, even when re-reading books with which she is already familiar, and finds points of interest which explicitly enable her to begin to exercise some textual power. Choosing *Sisterland*, by Linda Newbery (one of the five authors whose interviews were studied by the class as a prelude to their interviews with parents and grandparents), Abigail writes:

I've read this book before, and I heard about the book and Newbery when it was part of a reading task in an english lesson. I thought it sounded an interesting topic, especially as it's focused partly on WWII which is [a] period I've always enjoyed learning about. I've always loved history and historical books like Philipa Gregory or Daphne DuMaurie. And although I've read it before I'd forgotten the twists and lots of details so it was still an active experience. I think it's really cleverly written as it swaps between a present day 17 year old girl and her problems, and a 10 year old German refugee in the 1940s.

Other girls leave books unfinished, though, because like Stuart they overestimate what will motivate them. Louisa abandons Wilson's *Girls in Tears* which she has read before and now finds boring, 'just one of those books you can't go back too',

while Naomi finds Wilson's *Love Lessons* boring as well: 'The story line was so predictable ... and it didn't grab my attention'.

Thus, whilst one of the most obvious features of the class's reading, as recorded in their journals, is its variety, an underlying feature is its precariousness. Because many of the class would count themselves as habitual readers, they are relatively willing to try a range of different texts, whether familiar or new; but precisely because they are committed readers they also have strong expectations of what they hope the experience will bring and (with some exceptions like Raymond) they are unwilling to persevere with reading that does not meet those expectations. Embarking on *Taming the Tiger*, Nathan lists the screening process he has gone through to assess its likely appeal:

I first saw the book on recommendation of a friend, who lent me the book – having read the blurb, heard my friends' description and read the first chapter I decided to read the book. The book appealed to me firstly because it is a true non-fictional account of a real story, which is good especially as I have read a lot of fiction recently. The book sounded fast paced [paced] and compelling.

The main reasons students give for their expectations not being met are that the text presents too few or too many challenges. The challenges themselves are varied. In Nathan's case, he abandons the book because, he says, he did not enjoy it. He does not say why, but there are hints from his journal entries that the brutalised upbringing Anthony describes is not the kind of fast-paced and compelling reading he was attracted by at the outset. It is certainly a far cry from the fantasy and humour that Nathan has enjoyed in his reading thus far.

Luke and Sam's reading journals: different challenges

When considering the students' choices of books to read, it is important to avoid hasty judgments about the relative qualities of adult and teenage literature. To many authors, and indeed to some readers, the distinction is a marketing one, rather than inherent in the literature itself. Some teenage fiction is more challenging in substance, style and structure than some adult fiction. Aspects of fiction which are susceptible to being measured, for example by applying 'readability' formulae such as those developed by Flesch or Fry (Lunzer and Gardner, 1979) to their lexis and syntax, are part of a much greater whole

including elements such as chronotope, narrative viewpoint, voice and values whether implied or explicit, and so on. How does Michael Morpurgo's *Private Peaceful*, for example, Luke's choice for his journal, compare with Clive Cussler's *Polar Shift*, an adult adventure thriller, recommended to Sam by his father? In the earlier group interview, Luke says he has already read *Private Peaceful* so he appears to have elected to re-read it. He does not say why he has chosen it or why he gives up on his journal entries once the Peaceful brothers arrive in France. Some of his early writing shows attention to details of Thomas Peaceful's family. It is possible that he may have been writing from memory: part way through he confuses the two brothers' names and makes no mention of other key characters. Or, it may be that characterisation rather than plot is foregrounded when re-reading and this aspect of the novel appears not to interest Luke much. The novel's chronotope, furthermore, is complex. The setting of *Private Peaceful* is immediately before and during World War 1. However, the novel has a dual timescale: it moves forward through the hours and minutes of the night before Charlie Peaceful's execution; simultaneously, it charts Thomas's memories from his early childhood through to his present vigil, both narrative threads being cut off at the end of the day of Charlie's death. The spaces of the novel are equally tightly controlled: from the claustrophobic home and village to the even more claustrophobic parameters of war-stricken France. The chronotope is constrained compared with other novels Luke has mentioned in the group interview, books he describes as 'actiony' like Anthony Horowitz's Alex Rider series. He also describes himself more than once as a 'slow reader', a hazard perhaps when faced with *Private Peaceful* in which pace is created through development of relationships as much as action. Therefore, *Private Peaceful* offers multiple challenges to which, on this occasion, Luke does not rise. However, since evidence from other data suggests he does count reading as something he does for pleasure, it remains unclear why his journal entries are incomplete.

Polar Shift, on the other hand, deals with different kinds of human relationships and warfare. The novel revolves around a global threat posed by neo-anarchists who pit themselves against the world's elite powers using electromagnetic technology to bring about a polar shift. Cussler is a marine archaeologist and founder of the National Underwater and Marine Agency (NUMA) which features in fictional form in his novels. With his co-writer Paul Kemprecos, Cussler

devises plots and characters with co-ordinates recognisable in the real world. They also require the reader to follow a large cast of players in a range of settings on land, at sea and in the air as the warring forces attempt to outwit one another. The writing includes much to interest the reader in terms of science, technology, encryption, geophysics and literature (the key protagonist enjoys reading Plato, Melville and Conrad, for example) and for the most part proceeds through its five hundred-plus pages at the kind of fast pace common in action adventure films. Sam's journal impresses in terms of his fluency within the discourse and his apparent ability to grasp details of the plot, including the science and the rudimentary politics. At one point he explains:

Now that NUMA had Karla on their team they began to make an "antidote" to the low electromagnetic frequency waves used to cause the whirlpools and freak waves and possibly a polar shift.

Spider Barret, who was now working with NUMA to save the world, worked with Karla to find the right low frequency waves to counteract the low frequency waves being emitted by Lucifers (the neo-anarchists group) ship.

They worked over night to install the flattened cone shaped transmitter to the bottom of a Boeing 747's fuselage. They had so little time to create the machine so they couldn't test it before they took off in the morning chasing lucifers ship to the South Atlantic.

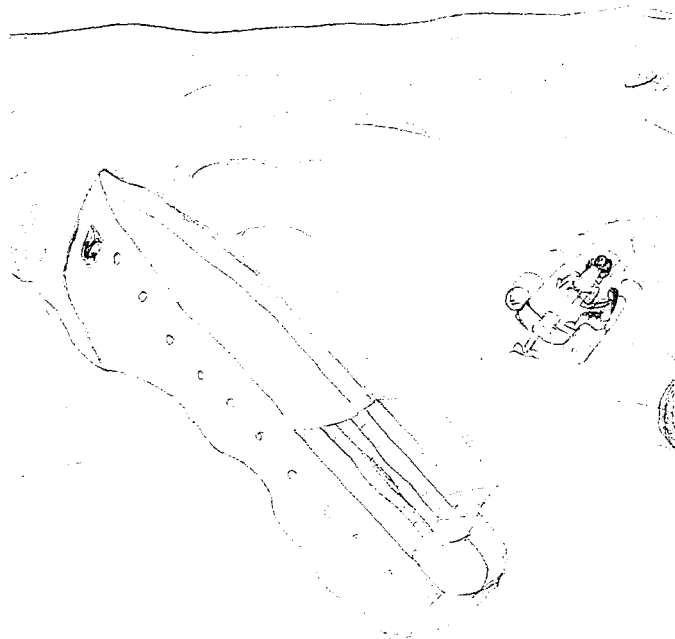


Figure 8.2

Sketch from Sam's reading journal

Some of the drawn sketches Sam includes in his journal suggest his ability to bring his prior knowledge to bear on what he is reading and are a reminder of how differently individual readers may make sense of the same text. My own reading of the novel was at times impeded by the difficulty I faced trying to imagine what was being described, for example the two characters who find themselves in their small boat being sucked into a whirlpool. Sam's sketch (Figure 8.2) has, on the other hand, the two quite precisely positioned in their boat and in another drawing the 'cone shaped transmitter' alluded to above is clearly visible.

However, in places where aspects of the plot threaten not to align with his knowledge of the real world, his critical faculties begin coming into play. Writing about the underground trek, he records that:

They reached a huge cavern that was brightly lit, but it was not lit by the sun as they were hundreds of feet inside an extinct volcano, it was lit by the rocks around them!! (At first I thought this was a bit far fetched but it can happen).

Later he dismisses the dwarf mammoths as 'definitely far fetched' but nonetheless enjoyable. His final summary is:

Altogether this book is a great read and I would recommend it to anyone who likes adventure novels, although it is a bit over the top at times It makes you want to read on.

Over the top and far-fetched at times it may be, but there is plenty for Sam to commit to. It seems there are the right kind of challenges for him here to make him want to read on. Possibly it is easier for young readers like Sam or Luke to imagine the kind of scenarios proposed in *Polar Shift* than *Private Peaceful* because they require the reader to reconfigure imaginatively the characters' strategic moves more than empathise with their emotions. It may, however, be that the space-time co-ordinates of the chronotopes of *Polar Shift* can perhaps be more easily mapped onto those of young readers' experience from elsewhere, especially other prose narratives such as Alex Rider or Young James Bond, but also current news or action adventure films.

Thomas's reading journal: 'this book is very unsure of itself'

Thomas was recommended Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* by his mother but from the outset approached his reading with some scepticism: 'I haven't seen the

film yet but I've been told it was a shocker and the book is much better'. His journal entries make interesting reading for two reasons. Firstly, they record the ebb and flow of his response which is, as he summarises, very mixed:

I think this is one of the most inconsistent books I have ever read. The pace goes up and down like a yo-yo and the author insists on vomiting useless facts in an attempt to liven up the story in dull periods. I think this book is very unsure of itself: Is it an adventure or a documentary.

Secondly, his entries show a preference for critical analysis rather than plot summary and prediction. He quite often draws diagrams to demonstrate the idea he is postulating. Early on, for example, he draws a two-column table to show how the central character, Robert Langdon, 'could be based on someone like Indiana Jones'. The source of this idea is not clear: it might be something he has discussed with his mother, or that he has discovered to be quite commonly suggested in online reviews of the book. Whatever its source, he appreciates the idea sufficiently to set it out in diagrammatic form in his journal as if to see for himself how it works. Perhaps (as is the case with many other films his peers cite in relation to their reading) the link with the *Indiana Jones* franchise offers him a cultural reference point to use as leverage as he tries to engage with this particular novel. Similarly, he draws a diagram of how the murdered Jacques Saunier was discovered and writes underneath 'he did this to himself! Spooky!' apparently enjoying the combination of symbolism and the mystery waiting to be solved.

A close reading of Thomas's complete journal entries for this novel is interesting in terms of the way he tries to position himself critically as a reader. In his opening and closing sentences he refers to himself in the first person: first, he is the anticipating reader, hoping that the recommendations he has received will be validated; later, he is the disappointed reader sharing with some of the reviews he seems to have gleaned from elsewhere the opinion that the novel is 'very unsure of itself'. In the intervening journal entries we see him buffeted around between the fast-paced murder mystery adventure whose challenges he seems to relish and the factual elements documenting the search for the holy grail which, in Thomas's view, slow the pace right down again. In the early stages of the novel he brings his critical knowledge to bear, reading the front cover and deducing from its design that the book promises to be intricate and complex – at this point qualities presented as desirable. Once under way, he finds the pace 'very strong' whilst the

description and imagery are 'very precise'. However, he does not continue to write his journal entries in the first person singular, shifting instead through a number of other verbal gears, evidence perhaps of him simultaneously shifting positions (following Scholes) between reader, interpreter and critic:

After finishing the first chapter you hope that the pace will be maintained throughout the book.

In the first chapter you learn about the character 'Silas'. Silas really intrigues the reader and it looks like we will see more of him throughout the book.

On the whole, however, he tends more towards summarising the plot as he proceeds, only rarely commenting on the reading experience. Unlike some of his peers, however, Thomas has the stamina to follow through the novel and hence, like Sam, to be in a position to comment finally on the text overall.

Elizabeth, Andie and Lily's journals: 'I'd rather just read'

A number of students were often too caught up in their books to want to be overly reflective in their journal entries. One such reader is Elizabeth who (as already stated in Chapter 5) proved shy in the small-group interview and I was left unsure what kind of reader she perceived herself to be. I therefore opened Elizabeth's journal eager to see whether she would provide evidence in her writing about the kind of habitual and committed reader she apparently was. She had written about twenty-five pages of journal entries, responding animatedly to a number of books including the fourth in Charlie Higson's young James Bond series, *Hurricane Gold*; *Stop in the Name of Pants* by Louise Rennison, the eighth in the Georgia Nicolson series; and the first three books in the Alex Rider series, *Stormbreaker*, *Point Blanc* and *Skeleton Key*. The image of the reader constructed from the pages of the journal, therefore, is rather different from the persona projected in the group interview. Ironically, the most salient feature is Elizabeth's highly conversational style of response, drawing on a number of instant messaging conventions. Whilst her entries leave the reader in no doubt about her exuberant engagement with plot lines (as the young James Bond and his companion, Precious, tangle with a customary ruthless villain, for example) and her enjoyment of the humour of Georgia Nicolson's diaries, it is not easy to detect how she is engaging at the level of interpretation or criticism. On more than one occasion she articulates the tension she feels, like others in the group, between wanting to read on and having

to stop and write: 'I don't really want to write all the stuff I'm thinking down – I'd rather just read it!' When she does write down what she's thinking about one of the Georgia Nicolson books, she has a fair point to make:

Hmmm ... This isn't really a book that makes you think ... It's more of just a bit of fun ... There's never much to write except Ha Ha! ...
☺ I like these books because they make me laugh + I find them good to read after I've read some serious books that change your mood + make you think + stuff. But the annoying thing is that theres never much to write! I 'spose I could write the storyline + what's happening + stuff but I don't think that's really important for this kind of thing.

She senses that she is being invited to contribute something more, perhaps, but either does not have enough in her critical reading repertoire to enable her to articulate other thoughts or the texts she has chosen to read are insufficiently challenging for her to do more than summarise the plot.

Several members of the class including Andie and Lily adopt a more informal, immediate and somewhat less reflexive style to record entries in their reading journals. Andie told Rosa she was feeling very anxious about writing a journal because she was reading so many books. She therefore used a form of recording and review which reads in part like a factfile page from a teenage magazine, in part like a competition announcement on a TV programme:

My 7th Book isss ... ****
BREAKING DAWN by Stephanie Meyer – Thank God!! At last the next (fingers crossed not final) Twilight book is out!!!
Previous books read – Twilight, New moon, Eclipse and The host!

Lily, too, conveys a clear sense of her excitement and anticipation as she waits for *Eclipse* to arrive and, when it does, reads so much of it so quickly that she is understandably disinclined to pause and write as well:

Have read the other books ... they are FANTASTIC!! I have chosen to read this book, as it leaves the 2nd book on a cliffhanger. I have read the first 2 books about 5 times each! ...

I hope the third book is as good as the other 2 books! I will treasure the trilogy for the rest of my life!! ...

Apparently girls all over the country are searching for their own 'Edward Cullens' (male vampire who sounds completely gorgeous!!) ... I think I'm one of them !! ...

YAYYAY!! My new book came!! Soooo happy! It is sooo fantastic. I've read the first 100 pages in 1 hour!

It is tantalising that Lily does not comment on how her knowledge and understanding of *Twilight* and *New Moon* change with each re-reading; nor does she explain why she will treasure the trilogy for the rest of her life. It is important, however, to note that her comment with its cautionary '[a]pparently' and 'I think', her pluralising of 'girls' and 'Edward Cullens' and her use of scare quotes, exclamation marks and ellipses makes it clear that she is in no danger of simply identifying herself with the novels' heroine, Bella. On the contrary, we can infer she is able to position herself more critically, even though she also has the capacity to become completely absorbed in what she is reading. The concept of *identification* is also of particular interest in the final journal entries I intend to analyse in this chapter. They, too, are about *Twilight*.

Freya's journal: 'helping me understand a book in greater depth'

'Practised readers tolerate uncertainty ... I wish I knew more about how we learn to tolerate uncertainty in our reading and what we are really doing,' writes Margaret Meek in *How texts teach what readers learn* (Meek, 1988). This thought-provoking comment is pertinent to consider within this chapter, given what I have already written about the precarious balance between carrying on with a new book or giving up. My own response to Meek's comment is that wherever possible we should ask readers directly since their answers can sometimes be extraordinarily lucid. Victor Watson (2000) for example quotes a child of his acquaintance explaining the difference between starting to read a new novel and starting a book in an already familiar series: the former, says the child, is like going into a room full of strangers, the latter like going into a room full of friends. For most readers, Watson continues, there is 'a wariness in beginning a new book ... [a] degree of watchfulness' (*ibid.*, p. 6) as they orientate themselves to the author's style, the setting and the characters they encounter. Hugh Crago, experimenting with keeping a journal whilst reading Jill Paton Walsh's *A Chance Child* vividly describes the process of actively wrestling with the opening stages of any aesthetic experience such as a novel, play or film:

A common-sense explanation would be that we need to establish our points of reference before we can expect to understand the rest of a tale. A less obvious and by no means contradictory explanation ... is that all readers of whatever age need a *defence* against the emotional impact of the new imaginative experience provided by a novel ... and that they defend themselves by moving in and out of the world of the

novel, asking questions about it, comparing it with their own world – being very *rational* precisely because they are under *emotional* threat (Crago, 1982, p. 179).

Crago's interest in psychotherapy may explain his greater emphasis on readers' subliminal emotive responses than the journal data I have received suggest is evident. However, he also notes that his journal entries are most prevalent in the early stages of the novel and that once he has orientated himself to the imaginative world under construction, he prefers to succumb to the trance-like state induced by his reading rather than deliberately break it in order to record his responses. Whether determined or defensive, readers must still be prepared to wonder for a while; however, their curiosity must be sufficiently aroused to want to continue reading. Journals are a useful space in which to ask questions to which readers genuinely want to know the answers, using their writing as a means to orientate themselves to the text and thus providing data which could shed light on what it is readers do to sustain them as they try to establish a relationship with a new book.

As is already evident, Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* books were popular with several students during the period when they were writing their journals. The first film, however, was still in production and the journal entries therefore focus entirely on the students' reading of the novels. Here, I concentrate on just one student's writings about *Twilight*, because out of all the group's journals it is the one which incorporates the widest range of reading stances and therefore provides interesting data to discuss in this final part of the chapter. Whilst the other journals include one or more of the stances, Freya's adopted all of them at various points, interesting evidence of the shifting positions a reader may take up during the reading of a single text. This is not to say that other readers did not also favour similarly varied stances in the actual reading, but without explicit *evidence* in the journals that they did it is impossible to know. Freya's journal, however, provides extremely persistent, valuable evidence of the process of one person's reading. Her journal comprises thirteen pages of lucid style and fluent handwriting amounting to almost four thousand words. There are no dates; each entry simply picks up where the last one left off. Freya does, however, put down page markers so it is obvious where in the novel she is when she stops to write an entry. It was handed in to me in November. Having read it, I returned it – as with all the other journals – with an individual reply.

Almost the last comment Freya makes in her journal is about writing the journal itself:

Although I have enjoyed doing this reading journal it has actually slowed my reading down loads and I don't think I'll want to do a journal for the sequel. It has been really useful to me though by helping me understand a book in greater depth.

Analysis of the data which Freya's journal comprises is not so much an attempt to understand what she means by that but more to explore the journal as evidence of some of what appears to happen when a reader reads a text like *Twilight*. That is made possible, in part, by the very fact that Freya was willing to slow her reading down and articulate her ongoing responses. As she herself recognises, it makes those otherwise fleeting thoughts available for critical inspection: 'I have enjoyed doing the reading journal for this book and am looking forward to reading back through it in a minute'. Neither the journal entries nor any analysis and interpretation of them can possibly do full justice to the complexity of the private reading experience. However, thanks to Freya's efforts, we have some fragments from which to begin to construct what appears to be going on and evidence with which to counter common misconceptions or unsubstantiated assertions about young people as readers. What I intend to do here is analyse some characteristics of the writing and discuss what material they contribute to these arguments.

Nicholas Tucker whose scholarship in the field of children's literature is strongly grounded in a psychoanalytical approach, states that one explanation for the phenomenal success of the *Twilight* series is that because Meyer's stories hinge on a human girl falling in love with a vampire boy they 'allow girl readers to experiment with strong feelings of submission and desire without having to engage with the whole potentially problematic topic of sex itself' (Tucker, 2010, p. 5). Furthermore, the attractive heroine, Bella, and the affluent American lifestyle she enjoys make her, according to Tucker, 'a supreme fantasy object' (*ibid.*). Whilst some of Freya's journal entries at first reading appear to corroborate Tucker's hypothesis, closer analysis suggests much greater complexity than he allows, as when she comments on Edward Cullen:

I would now love to meet Edward Cullen. He sounds amazing enough for anyone not to be held back by the fact that he is a vampire. Edward reminds me of a saying "If nobody is perfect, I must be nobody." ie

Edward is nobody – not human – and he is perfect, beautiful, amazing.
I want to be Bella ☹.

The wistful ‘I want to be Bella’ initially appears to confirm Tucker’s point about Bella as fantasy object but the sad emoticon signals that Freya is only too well aware that she is *not* Bella. Furthermore, whilst the opening sentence suggests Freya believes in the existence of a young man called Edward Cullen, the next reminds us that she knows he is an imaginary construct – a vampire – with the third elaborating on his non-existence, his perfection achieved precisely because he is not a human being. This perfection is a source of aesthetic pleasure, as Freya acknowledges explicitly towards the end of her journal when she reflects on why she has not included any drawings in it:

I think I probably didn’t feel like drawing scenes from this book because I was actually scared to get it wrong, because everything from the book is in my mind as images and I don’t want to ruin that by drawing something I don’t think is right. Also, everything, especially the vampires in the book, seems too perfect to draw.

The images Freya seems able to construct in her mind are part of the book’s strong allure, but not the only one. Journal entries like these are an antidote to generalisations like Tucker’s, serving instead as a reminder of the need to attend not only to readers’ long-term trajectories but also to their minute-by-minute shape-shifting. Further close analysis of Freya’s journal entries suggests that many other facets of narrative combine to form the motivation and pleasure she derives from the novel overall.

For example, her journal is punctuated by references to the plot, presumably to help her keep track of the characters’ different actions, sometimes with more additional commentary as if writing a review. Initially, these plot comments are almost all brief, written in the present tense and sometimes just in note form, for example ‘Bella arrives at the school – empty’. As Freya gains a clearer oversight of the novel’s characters and plot she attaches more extended retrospective commentary to the bare account of character action or event:

Alice has detected someone coming. Three more vampires. A while ago in the book, Edward warned Bella not to go into the woods alone. He must have said this because of vampires there.

Only about one sixth of Freya's entries, however, comprise comments on plot and character. By the far the greater part of the journal is a complex mix of reflection on her aesthetic reading of the book which includes thoughts about the locations in which she is reading it and about the journal writing itself; interpretive questions raised by the text; speculation and prediction; comparisons between the characters, especially Bella, and her own sense of self; and use of cultural knowledge to adopt a critical stance towards the text. Although it is to some extent possible to distinguish the above features of the writing separately, more often they are intertwined. Here, for example, is an extract from the entry labelled 'p.71':

Edward asks Bella if he can take her to seattle; she accepts. Then they sit together at lunch! Edward says if Bella is smart she will not be friends with him, because he is bad. Bella is not smart – NO! He may seem interesting, but he will be bad. This is frustrating for me to read as I can imagine myself in Bella's shoes and know it must be awful to see such an amazing-looking and interesting boy and knowing you should not be friends with him. I think Bella is in love with Edward, although it has not yet been mentioned. I don't think even she realises it yet – Edward probably does. This is the type of story which you begin reading thinking it will all be a perfect, passionate relationship between two loving people – but it all goes wrong.

This book reminds me a lot of Edward Scissorhands, a film by Tim Burton, now I realise it. I can imagine Edward Cullen living in the same house as Edward Scissorhand's in the film. I can also imagine Edward Cullen looking similar to Edward Scissorhands when he is older, as it does not match his current description.

Although the extract begins with an update on the relationship between the protagonists, it quickly shifts into evaluation with Freya's use of an exclamation mark to demonstrate her awareness of the potential for plot development of the two sitting together at lunch. Next comes a short piece of analysis which captures the essence of the problem at the heart of the novel: a human girl contemplating a prohibitive relationship with a vampire boy. Freya immediately goes on to articulate her stance towards what she is reading: frustration. It is extremely important to note that her words represent the complexity of her position as a reader. She has not fallen victim to the grip of what Maria Nikolajeva has called *identification fallacy* (Nikolajeva, 2010a; 2010b), that is somehow thinking of herself as *being* Bella. On the contrary, close reading of her comments shows she positions herself quite distinctively from Bella: she expressly acknowledges that she is writing as a reader when she describes the episode as 'frustrating for [her]

to read'; she claims she can imagine herself 'in Bella's shoes' but does not suggest she has actually somehow become Bella; instead, she offers an evaluative generalisation of the situation, knowing 'it must be awful to see such an amazing-looking and interesting boy and knowing you should not be friends with him'. As long ago as the 1930s, and again in the 1960s, psychoanalyst D.W. Harding explored the crucial distinction between being a participant or a spectator in an event and the evaluative potential offered by spectatorship which participants are denied, caught up as they are in reacting spontaneously to what is happening around them (Harding, 1962/1977). He, and others like James Britton who subsequently took up his ideas (Britton, 1970), applied the same pattern to the role of the reader. I would argue that spectating is precisely what Freya appears to be engaged in here, whilst still greatly enjoying the affective dimension of what she is reading. She exemplifies what other participants in this study have repeatedly described when asked what they think happens when they become absorbed in what they are reading, namely a pleasurable tension between empathy with characters and the more detached evaluation the spectator or bystander can enjoy. Such distinctions are important to spell out to avoid readers being labelled as unsophisticated or their readings as naïve. Nikolajeva's concept of the identification fallacy is argued theoretically from a narratologist's position, based on assertions about teachers and readers, not empirical evidence. Freya's journal presents a strong alternative case. Whilst she often compares herself with Bella and even, at times, engages in some wish-fulfilment, she never confuses her real-world self with the fictional Bella. Instead she shuttles back and forth, 'trafficking in human possibilities rather than in settled certainties' (Bruner, 1986, p. 26), as here, for instance, when she writes in conditional mood:

If I were Bella, I probably would have been worried about this too, but I also always think that walking could be very romantic. It can take you to beautiful places: like the meadow Edward has taken Bella to. It sounds absolutely amazing. Beautiful. I would have wanted a camera with me!

She moves from speculation or subjunctivising to articulating a point of her own in which she connects walking with romance and beautiful places before returning to the meadow in the novel. Presumably, this is one of the images from the book Freya feels is 'too perfect to draw' hence the possibility of capturing it on camera occurs to her, a notion which her use of the exclamation mark, once again,

indicates is entirely hypothetical. At other times she adopts a more distinct critical stance. For example, returning to the longer extract above, an aspect of Freya's criticality is manifest in her reference to the film, *Edward Scissorhands*. At various points in her journal she demonstrates awareness of different types of vampires and their powers, gleaned presumably from prior reading, film-viewing and television. Here, however, she explicitly makes links between characterisation in different media offering a glimpse (not only to us but to her, it would seem, from her comment 'as I now realise') of the cultural resources on which she is drawing to construct her idea of Edward Cullen.

A more intimate and personal interpretive comment comes towards the end of the journal when Edward and Bella attend the school prom together and because of the injury Bella has sustained in her fight with the other vampires, she is not easily able to dance on her own. Freya writes:

I think the way Bella dances standing on Edward's shoes is really sweet! It reminds me of when I used to stand on my Dad's shoes when I was little. It makes Edward seem a bit like a protective father figure to Bella.

In three simple, straightforward sentences, she conveys an arguably sophisticated response, which is at once aesthetic ('really sweet') *and* interpretive ('It reminds me') *and* cultural ('makes Edward seem a bit like a protective father figure'). From the perspective of reader-response and textual studies theorists like Rosenblatt or Scholes, she articulates her transaction with the text and the dynamics of her reading very precisely.

Elsewhere, she draws again on various cultural understandings she is bringing to the text sometimes also stepping further back from her absorption to reflect more critically on what she is reading. In the early stages of the book, for example right at the beginning when thinking about the symbolism of the front cover design, she notes:

There is an image of two hands holding an apple. I think this looks interesting, and wonder why an apple has been chosen for the story. The apple is blood red, and although the hands are grasping it tightly, it looks as if it could be harmful to them.

Her use of the phrase 'blood red' is resonant of narrative moments such as Snow White biting into the poisoned apple or Eve in the Garden of Eden and suggests a familiarity with cultural material she may have encountered at home or at school as well as the ability to read and interpret visual imagery in narrative terms.

Later, perhaps prompted by Rosa's encouragement of active reading, she reflects on Meyer's writing, too: 'I absolutely adore Meyer's descriptions – bubbling music of a stream, I had to pause, because I just think this is lovely,' she enthuses. On another occasion, she engages with a single word, 'irrevocably':

I don't think I have heard the word irrevocably before. I will look it up now.

Irrevocable – not able to be changed, reversed, or recovered

~ This fits perfectly. Love this word now! Not sure why!

Here, too, there is an interesting combining of exploration and response, rather than merely one or the other.

Two other noticeable features of Freya's journal writing emerge from the data analysis. One is the range of speculation and prediction she displays. Unlike her peers who found the books they had chosen too predictable, Freya seems to relish the opportunities *Twilight* provides to keep her guessing, to predict and remain uncertain: her entries are peppered with evidence that she is being made to think, wonder, guess, imagine, speculate. Take, for example, how she writes about thinking. The phrases she uses, in addition to 'I think', include: 'I did actually think'; 'There I was thinking'; 'At the time I thought'; 'I would have thought'. There are also numerous instances of 'I wonder' or 'I wonder why' or 'I wonder if'. She often employs expressions like 'maybe' or 'probably' as well as 'I can imagine' or 'I am guessing'. There is, therefore, a momentum about the writing, evidence that her ideas are indeed constantly fluctuating and susceptible to change rather than fixed and definitive.

A final interesting feature of the reading journal data, of particular relevance to this study, is Freya's capacity for meta-reflection, both on the process of reading a novel over a period of time and on the process of keeping a journal itself. Here, for example, she captures lucidly something her mother, Olivia, interestingly also

mentioned in her interview, namely the feeling of keeping company with a book in gaps between reading it or after it is finished. Freya muses:

I was sitting in first lesson today at school which was geography, and I wanted nothing more than to be able to get the book out of my bag to read. It was an odd craving, and my book wasn't even in my bag, it was at home. I'm not sure how the thought of the book came into my mind as we were learning about rainforests; but it just seemed to be there. Now it is after school, and is boiling hot again so I am outside. It doesn't really feel right reading this book outside when it is so sunny; because it is usually raining in the book, in Forks. The ideal time for reading this book would probably be inside on a rainy day, when you can't go outside and you are feeling all warm and cosy snuggled up in bed. That way, you are still comfortable like you normally would be reading a book, but you still have some sense of what the weather in the book would be like from the sound of rain on your roof.

What she describes seems to marry with Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, acknowledging as she does the difference between the time-space of her own life, whether in a geography lesson in school or in the garden or indoors at home, and that of the book. Her craving to be reading (not an inappropriate word to use in the context of a book like *Twilight*) complements an observation she made earlier in her collage about Zevin's novel *Elsewhere* which, she said, seemed to stay with her after she had finished it. Interestingly, she mentioned *Elsewhere* again in her journal, this time in the context of another particular pleasure which, like *Twilight*, it afforded her as a reader:

I love reading books that seem to make you believe in things that you would normally think weren't real – like vampires. I also once read a book called *Elsewhere* ... About a sort of 'heaven'. It caused me to believe everything the book said at the time, even though I knew it wasn't true. It makes you want to believe the things you read in books are true.

This comment, too, with its subtle shift between not believing and wanting to believe, confounds accusations that reading popular texts like *Twilight* is a passive experience; on the contrary, it involves deliberately seeking out a particular form of aesthetic pleasure that apparently allows for things simultaneously to be and not to be, one of the most powerful aspects of the allure of novel reading amongst the participants in this study, as I have already discussed.

Journals as evidence

Freya's journal offers evidence of her asking and trying to answer authentic questions of the text, in a conversation with herself or imagined others about the book she is reading and although she finds the journal somewhat arduous to keep, she acknowledges its value for her as a reader. For teachers and researchers, too, it provides interesting evidence of one young person's reading trajectory over a period of time and some of the other trajectories with which it combines to form the spatial parameters of her readership. Freya has plenty of cultural resources on which to draw in the transaction of reading, for example her own immediate social experiences of being a teenage girl, of family life, of prospective boyfriends as well as wider cultural knowledge accrued from prior reading, films, art.

Although keeping reading journals seems to have provoked more resistance than the other research methods amongst this group of readers, they nonetheless add valuable material towards the constructions of young readers created by the interviews and collages. In my concluding chapter, I will therefore argue the need for multiple methods when researching young people's reading, rather than relying on any one approach.

9 CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I recapitulate the aim of the overall study and identify original features in the design of the research. I also summarise the central findings arising from the data analysis in relation to the research questions. I foreground what I consider to be some of the implications of the findings, not only for classroom teachers and educational researchers but also young readers themselves. I reflect on the limitations of the research before, finally, suggesting ways in which some of the findings might advance teaching of, and research into, other young readers in other contexts.

The aim of the overall study

The aim of this study has been to explore how the readership of twelve- to thirteen-year-old readers who regularly read for a variety of purposes and pleasures is constructed, combining four different research methods to address the research questions I posed and then analysing the data from four theoretical perspectives. A particular focus has been individual readers' trajectories as they develop over time in the spaces created by their interrelation with trajectories of other readers and texts. I have also been concerned to consider how any findings from the research might contribute to the work of those involved closely with other young readers, especially English teachers.

Although the methodology has included many features of a case study with an English class as its unit of analysis, the field of the research has had much more fluid boundaries than those often used to define a case study. The data relating to the students as readers, their reading and their readership, have not only been generated via classroom teaching designed to provoke memory, thought, reflection and group discussion; they have been generated by asking students to interview an adult in their family as well. This extended reach of the field stems from the pedagogy informing it which not only accommodates domains of knowledge, skills, curriculum and practice, but also – as Alexander urges – culture and values which:

locate it – and children themselves – in time, place and the social world, and anchor it firmly to the questions of human identity and

social purpose without which it makes little sense. (Alexander, 2004, p. 11).

The study has taken as its starting point critical theoretical literature the motive for which has likewise, in part, been pedagogical, often produced by university lecturers such as Rosenblatt, Iser and Scholes who are predominantly theorists of literary reading or textual study with aspirations not merely to *teach* their students *knowledge* but *educate* them into *understanding*. Although not pragmatists *per se*, their thinking often appears to be provoked by tensions created in the encounter between text and reader in their seminars, tensions which require pragmatic, though not superficial, resolutions, just as they do for teachers working with younger students and children in schools rather than universities. In the words of the editors of a seminal work on children's reading from the 1970s, *The Cool Web*:

Teachers have discovered that, in coming to terms with the challenge of children learning to read, they find themselves asking over and over again 'What is reading *for*?' (Meek, Warlow and Barton, 1977, p. 4).

My study was further prompted by the limitations of reading surveys whose findings have provided broad knowledge but, often by the researchers' own admission, have not contributed to greater understanding about reading or what it might be for. In order to make a distinct and original contribution to the field, my research has, by contrast, deliberately sought to exploit the paradoxes of small-scale study (Simons, 1996; Simons, 2009) in order to research reading. Its findings are paradoxical because they are characterised by idiosyncrasy which nevertheless forms a pattern (Rose, 2008). The strength of this kind of qualitative research into reading is not only its intention 'to try to capture the essence of the particular in a way we all recognise' (Simons, 2009, p. 167) but also its inconclusiveness because inconclusiveness bespeaks the complexity that reading entails. However, if the evidence of how readers *within* the study construct their reading and readership engages the reader *of* the study, it has the power to set in train a new transaction with potential implications for new ways of understanding both reading pedagogy and research.

Originality in the design of the research

The originality in the design of the research arises from the interplay of epistemological views with particular pedagogical and methodological

approaches. Thus, the social constructionist stance I have taken (Crotty, 2003; Gergen, 2009), in relation to classroom activities being used simultaneously for teaching, learning and research, has afforded opportunities to understand readers, reading and readership in different ways from much published research hitherto. Whilst ideas of reading as *transaction* (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994), *response* (Iser, 1978) and *action* (Scholes, 1989) and classroom discussion as a site for reader *interaction* (Vygotsky, 1986; Bruner, 1996) will be familiar perspectives to many working in the field, the addition of two other perspectives – both the spatial (Massey, 2005) and the historical (Rose, 2001) – viewed from a social constructionist standpoint is unusual, offering possibilities for original rather than reiterative outcomes.

Furthermore, the specific combination of different ways to generate data – one of which (students interviewing a parent or grandparent), as far as I am aware, has not been used as a research method before – has afforded the opportunity to gather new kinds of evidence of the roles played by family members in the shaping of young people's readership. Therefore, the analysis of the data has arguably provided material for new constructions of reading to be raised and different ways of understanding what it is readers do. Extending the research to draw on parents' and grandparents' perspectives has led to generation of additional and authentic data offering unusual perspectives. It strengthens the validity of the project by allowing the opportunity to compare and contrast students' and adults' respective representations of common topics.

Findings arising from the data analysis

Analysis of the data generated in response to my first two research questions shows there are many different reasons why habitual and committed readers read, many varied approaches to how they read and divergence in how they construe the material they read. Where there is commonality or convergence it is temporary, not permanent. The picture is thus fluid and shifting but distinguishable nevertheless. In terms of the scope and nature of the material students read, the findings are broadly in keeping with other major studies such as the *Children's Reading Choices* survey (Hall and Coles, 1999). My research questions, however, took students' reading choices as *a* starting point rather than *the* main point, with multiple methods designed to investigate their reading from

more complex perspectives than simply 'why' and 'how'. I sought to understand the social interactions and cultural values by means of which their readership was shaped and the extent to which bringing spatial and historical perspectives to bear enriched any emergent understandings about young readers' reading. In what follows, I draw out some of the most distinctive evidence from the data analysis and explore whether and how it suggests new ways of constructing reading.

Establishing parallels and distinctions

A particularly distinctive quality of the evidence is the finely-textured detail of participants' representations of reading, of how and why they read and the social interactions or cultural values inscribed in their comments. One particularly relevant feature is readers' descriptions of the ways they venture back and forth between the world of the text and the world they actually inhabit, with the potential to compare, contrast or gain a critical hold on either world from the vantage point of the readings they construct (Heaney, 1995). Reading is what children's novelist Beverley Naidoo describes as 'a bridge into other worlds ... a route into exploring our common humanity' (Naidoo, 2001). Certainly, for many in this study, reading does indeed form a bridge to learning about how others – whether alike or different – live, or have lived in the past, and thus a position from which to reflect on their own and others' situations. From the collages and the reading journals, there is evidence of students using their reading of both realist and fantasy novels, for example, to explore hypotheses about lives they recognise, whether similar or dissimilar to theirs. There is also evidence that they do likewise when reading action adventure stories or autobiographies which draw on real-world events, or when using historical fiction to re-construct lives lived in times past. Whatever their preferred reading, they seem to establish both parallels with and distinctions between the worlds they know and those represented in the text, hence operating in the realm of criticism and enhancing their textual power.

Readiness to re-read

The pleasure many students seem to derive from re-reading the same text several times suggests that each transaction is different, making repeated readings fruitful. It is possible that some of the empirical research discussed by David Miall which investigates what makes literary readings distinctive (Miall, 2006) is relevant here. The research to which Miall refers is largely experimental but findings from

more than one of the studies suggest that readers pay attention to the text differently when re-reading, for example to how the text is crafted as much as to how plot or content are structured. Findings from these studies also suggest that readers may read literary texts differently from non-literary texts because, in the process, they draw more on personal memories which involve the reader as an actor with a sense of agency than on factual memories gleaned from other sources than the personal and, when re-reading, they attend more closely to the style and structure of the writing. Miall acknowledges the singular nature of such experiments and the need for more holistic approaches which recognise the complexity of the reading process. Nevertheless, the different stances adopted by readers of literary as distinct from readers of non-literary material within the experiments he cites point to some potentially important answers to the question about why fiction and re-reading fiction has such allure. Within the context of my own study, they may help to explain patterns of absorption and reported pleasures of reading by participants. It would be interesting to develop research methods based on Miall's reported findings but designed to be undertaken in a richer, more naturalistic setting.

Different attitudes to creating imagined worlds

Another salient feature in the data analysis is students' very different attitudes to how and why they read. Bridges signify division as well as connection and at times readers in this study argue that they enjoy the fictional worlds they encounter precisely because they offer a temporary alternative space to explore, another territory with no particular obligation to learn about life from it. The fact that they choose to read connects them; their reasons for reading and the manner in which they read distinguishes them. For example, as we have already heard Thomas remarking of *The Hobbit*, 'I sort of connect to it in a different way because it's completely fantasy, like there's no way it could happen, but you don't have to connect to it in a real way'. Furthermore, as he says of popular spy fiction, it is entertaining: 'Everyone likes to imagine it – I mean no one likes to say – everyone likes to imagine themselves as a spy'.

Thomas's carefree views contrast with Freya's musing – echoing Scholes (1985) – over the centripetal urge to believe in what you are reading and the centrifugal pulling away because you know it is not believable which captures the constantly

shifting space some readers create and navigate when they read 'books that seem to make you believe in things that you would normally think weren't real'. Abigail elsewhere elaborates this point, like Freya relishing the pleasure of fantasy but also encapsulating, in passing, the essence for her of how and why she reads:

Abigail: I love the way that the author kind of makes up these things that no one else knows about and no one else has any idea how she comes up with them ... you know that they're not real and you know that it can't happen, but it's kind of believable ... it's so real the way she writes it and you can just imagine it happening, like behind some wall somewhere or something. It's just really good.

Delicately, and with extraordinary economy, she here articulates the transaction between the author (she), the reader (you), the text (it) to create the elusive reading, something which is there and not there simultaneously: *behind some wall somewhere*.

Although both stances might loosely be termed escapism with connotations of surrendering responsibility for oneself and one's present world, a social constructionist interpretation positions readers like these differently, as reading texts in order imaginatively to create detailed other worlds, not to become helplessly lost in them. Each of those created worlds will be different, even were the readers to be reading the same book. What the finding perhaps more pertinently suggests is that in actively contemplating the world of the book readers anticipate and evaluate characters' thoughts, actions and consequences. Although there may be 'no way it could happen', these young readers appear to care about the imagined worlds they construct, enjoy exercising agency and relish the alternative prospects their readings afford. One reason why they care may be that for all the fantastical or realist elements of these stories – whether geographical, supernatural, technical – they are still about recognisably human worlds and lives, however apparently alien they may appear. This point echoes one of Scholes's central rationales for reading quoted earlier in Chapter 2, that texts which take us on journeys of alienation help us, on our return, 'to be reconciled to our own humanity' (Scholes, 1985, p. 128).

Reading is precarious

A further finding is that, as students' responses in group interviews or individual journal entries suggest, whether and how each reading takes shape is always a precarious business. Readers may be constantly moving between reading and interpretation, as Scholes (1985) defines these two crucial activities, and sometimes into criticality. Even within the course of reading a single book, shifts in how readers read take place, often minutely as some of the journals show, as they orientate themselves to the text, then as they begin to construct meaning from their transaction with it. Whatever stance they adopt, nothing is static. They are constantly on the move. The spatial analysis of their collages supports the view that over the longer term, too, they are in motion, on occasions dipping into periods when they seem not to read much, other times reading voraciously.

Whether or not these readers sustain their interest sufficiently to complete a book appears to depend on how they construe the text and the factors involved in their encounter with it. Although my first two research questions cluster habitual and committed readers together, the data show that not only is there distinctiveness and diversity in their reasons for reading and the manner in which they read but also in their construal of what they read. Just as the transactions arising from the texts they choose are precarious and the habitual nature of their reading highly contingent, there is comparable fragility in their attitudes towards the material they read. Every encounter with a new book is delicately poised: if it is one they have already read or forms part of a familiar series, will it live up to its promise? If it is unfamiliar, will it live up to its recommendations? In what ways will the reader and the text interact with one another? To what extent will expectations, prior reading, readiness for new challenges enrich the encounter? What aspects may disappoint or overwhelm the reader? Extended stretches of data such as Charlie's reflections on reading *Hotel Rwanda* or Freya's encounter with *Twilight*, provide particularly important evidence to help us understand the range and scope of readers' construals of the material they read. The ways in which they characterise their encounters with texts are as varied as the readers and the materials in question. That they are so, paradoxically, emerges as a common pattern.

Shifting perceptions

Why and how these readers read also depends, the data analysis suggests, on how they perceive themselves as readers, what they feel like and who has recommended the reading matter to them. That is to say, it depends on social interaction and cultural values. Another salient feature arising from the data analysis is how they construct themselves and each other as readers and how they handle their encounters with cultural models which appear to cast readers in a negative light. The students' perceptions of themselves as readers can be strongly affected by how they assume their peers might judge them, in particular when they are in one another's presence. However, their image – like so much else involved in their reading – appears to be unstable, sometimes capable of being modified given sufficient time, sometimes changing altogether when their enthusiasm for reading comes to the fore.

An unusual characteristic of this study has been to include adult family members' perspectives as well as young people's via the interviews the students conducted with a parent or grandparent. Data from these, triangulated (where appropriate) with data from the students' collages and group interviews, create different constructions of adult involvement in young people's reading than those generated by much of the research already published. Previously, for example, investigations into young children's experiences of reading have tended to represent rather negatively the part played by male members of the family (Millard, 1997; Morgan, Nutbrown and Hannon, 2009) although a recent secondary analysis of data from a time-use survey rather than direct empirical research into reading takes a more positive view (Mullan, 2010). In my own study however, the kind of qualitative research often recommended at the end of (but not included in) survey-style research appears to have led to a stronger sense of the important part played by male as well as female family members in their children's reading. Analysis of the discourse of the fathers' responses in my study shows furthermore that their *attitude* to reading, especially reading aloud with their children, is what is important, undertaken as it often seems to be with shared pleasure, interest and enjoyment, rather than from a sense of duty. Even in the collages, there is evidence of both mothers *and* fathers reading aloud to their children. Taking a different approach to the research, it seems, can generate positive data in areas previously assumed to be stereotypically negative.

Reading and reciprocity

Another finding from the data analysis is the value and importance of reciprocity within reading relationships, not only between peers but, again, between the students and adult members of their family. The concept of reciprocity is slightly different to the common representation of parents who read for pleasure acting as role-models for their children to emulate (Strommen and Fowles Mates, 2004). Instead my data analysis suggests more complex relationships being established in response to books. Particularly striking is the way in which students themselves make recommendations about reading *to* their parents or grandparents; they are not simply on the receiving end. When they do receive recommendations from adults, they do not dismiss them out of hand, even if their initial reaction is to assume that because they were suggested by an adult it means they will not appeal. Instead, their confidence as readers often encourages them to take up recommendations, as is the case when students in this study select books to write about in their reading journals. The journals, because they were a requirement for English whether or not students offered their work for use in the research, seem to have acted as a catalyst in a number of cases for students to move out of their safety zone and try something new, with mixed results, but not outright rejection. Since several students seemed very aware of themselves growing into adulthood and were hence reluctant to read below their perceived levels of maturity, it appeared to be an opportune time for adults to be ready to make suggestions. It is worth noting that there are potentially several far-reaching implications of this reciprocity: sharing books provides an opportunity to talk about them; students realise they may be more sophisticated readers than their prior reading led them to believe; it lays down markers on their route to how they will develop as readers into adulthood.

The impact of spatial and historical perspectives

An interesting issue arising from my use of different theoretical perspectives is the extent to which there is overlap or distinctiveness between sociocultural theory and Massey's reconceptualisation of space. It has a bearing on my discussion of how interpreting the data from spatial perspectives affects the construction of readers, reading and readership. There are, indeed, parallels between these two theoretical perspectives, for example the primacy of social interaction and intersubjectivity as ways of knowing and making meaning in the world and

understanding of the effect and affect of cultural values on progress and development – whether from a cultural geographer's, sociologist's or educator's viewpoint. However, what distinguishes Massey's arguments about space is the integration or, to use her word, *implication*, of the temporal in the spatial whilst *simultaneously* retaining the distinctiveness of both dimensions. The momentum she accords to space comes from the notion of contemporaneous interactivity or tension in encounters between different trajectories and, at the same time, from the fact that those same trajectories have a history stretching back into their past and onwards into their possible futures. Thus, whilst sociocultural theory emphasises what is being constructed in the present, with the historical dimension perhaps more implicit rather than explicit, Massey deliberately foregrounds the importance of the temporal and the consequences of giving equal weighting to the historical.

A related issue applies to the temporal and the historical, with a bearing on the final research question about how taking a historical perspective illuminates contemporary young readers, reading and readership. There are two ways in which the historical as distinct from the temporal offers a vital additional perspective on reading. Both ways have to do with specificity. Whereas the temporal urges on us the concept of momentum and direction, lending support for example to Massey's powerful argument about anti-essentialism, the historical (in keeping with the particularities of case study research for example), attends to what it is from the past that matters to individuals – both the personal acts of repetition and narrative, and wider sociocultural understanding generated by recollection and analysis – and how the two are interconnected. The implications of bringing these additional perspectives to bear alongside sociocultural research have the potential to be profound, as I now summarise below.

In Chapter 6, I discussed data generated in the small group interviews which show some of the students constructing readers and writers in highly gendered ways, often in contrast with how they view themselves as readers when they are *not* in the company of their peers. The data include personal reminiscences such as Nathan's description of his younger self as a library user as well as more analytical arguments as Jessica attempts to account sociologically for what she perceives to be a temporary negative positioning of her peer group as readers. It is

instructive to set both these sections of the data alongside a historical account relating to the same issue, included by Rose in *The intellectual life of the British working classes* (2001). A merchant seaman called Lennox Kerr, born at the very end of the nineteenth century, was both a reader and a writer but felt that on board ship these were interests he needed to keep quiet. Rose quotes from Kerr's autobiography in which he laments:

... writing isn't for a working man. It sets him apart. Makes him lonely among his own people ... I had to take up every challenge as soon as it showed: had to swipe a chap's face when I did not want to, or boast about my splicing – just to prove that reading books was not making me any less a good sailor (*ibid.*, p. 180).

However, Rose comments that according to Kerr this attitude was confined to when the sailors were in groups; when alone it was a different matter:

... The secret desires in men come out as they feel themselves alone and free from the screen of cynicism men don in public ... I heard a man, the most foul-tongued on our ship, reciting the Song of Solomon to the darkness and the rustle of the sea breaking against the ship's forefoot. Alone, man becomes what he would be if he were not forced to a mould by the system he lives in (*ibid.*).

In my research, the data suggest that contemporary young readers, even those who are habitual and committed, can also adopt a 'screen of cynicism' to hide their self-consciousness of being readers at odds with temporarily predominant negative cultural models which accrue round reading (in Kerr's words, the mould into which the system forced him). The fact that the small-group interviews allowed time for students to explore, reflect on and even revise their comments during the discussion strengthens the argument for attending to *temporal* dimensions of readership. Setting the data alongside their own personal histories which, in this instance, include those of a parent or grandparent, is one way in which the argument is also made for the *historical* not merely the temporal. In the context of this study, the historical is first and foremost about specific people in their own families who, as adults, have manifestly overcome any barriers put in their way by such prejudices. However, my research also sets personal histories in a wider historical context to re-construct how readers, reading and readership more broadly have been construed in the past, how that compares with perceptions and attitudes from the present – the spatial – and thus offering firm foundations on which different constructions can be raised. The spatial and the

historical perspectives move some way towards rectifying the shortcomings expressed by those who remain largely wedded to survey-style research.

Implications of the findings

Taking a social constructionist approach to reading has many implications for how reading is taught and learnt in secondary school English classrooms. In particular it emphasises the role played by students as well as teachers in the joint construction of 'readings'. If students are responsible for the readings they imagine in their transaction with the texts they encounter, they need to learn to justify those readings and hence exercise textual power. All the power cannot then be seen to reside with the teacher; instead, a more democratic approach is required, with corresponding tensions, rights and responsibilities, for teachers and learners alike.

Taking spatial and historical perspectives involves adopting a much longer view of readers' trajectories over time and of their constantly changing dynamics, including whether such change is steady or turbulent. The implications are important: crucially, there is no point – from spatial and historical perspectives – either in making simple judgments about any individual reader on the basis of what they appear to be doing or able to do at any single moment in time or in drawing equally simplistic conclusions about their potential. Such practice would be as incoherent as making claims about the power and reach of a river from single stretch in its entire course. Instead, space characterised by Massey as 'a simultaneity of stories-so-far' encapsulates the co-existence of the past with the contemporary and hence the impossibility of extricating one from the other. The idea of a 'simultaneity of stories' has much in common with sociocultural theory with its notion that stories shape and are shaped in the process of interactions with others and that stories are always imbued with and products of cultural values. However, the additional, integral idea of 'so far' immediately brings into play the temporal and historical as well and the open-ended, personal and political possibilities for future pathways. The spatial and historical perspectives, therefore, acknowledge past achievements or pitfalls, tolerate unevenness and unpredictability and reconceptualise habit or commitment, not as fixed and stable entities, but paradoxically as arising out of change and encounters with uncertainty. In parallel with Bruner's notion of readers operating in the

subjunctive mood, viewing students as readers from these perspectives likewise means anticipating multiple possibilities for the future rather than settled certainties (Bruner, 1986).

There are, therefore, important implications for parents, teachers, researchers and the students themselves of adopting spatial and historical perspectives on reading. In particular, the emphasis should be not only to attend to what is evident in the here-and-now, but to construe it in the light of its trajectory thus far, acknowledge unpredictability, and capitalise on the potential such uncertainty allows. In the UK and many other countries where such ideas might be welcomed by teachers, the main barrier to their being taken on will be the short-termism of much of the political intervention in education with its need for immediate positive outcomes. Constructing a more richly-layered view of individual readers over much longer periods than the terms of office of most modern policy makers and politicians requires close attention to detail, tolerance of uncertainty, breadth of knowledge, capacity for understanding, and aspiration towards complexity. These are values and practices that are not compatible with the pressures currently faced by many English teachers and their students (and, indeed, by many educational researchers); they are, however, as I have argued in this thesis, central to any endeavour to deepen our understanding of young readers who *do* read. They are also, as I have attempted to demonstrate in the design and conduct of my research, pedagogically sound and productive of valid, reliable research.

Limitations of the research

An obvious limitation of the research overall lies in its purposive sampling and my intention from the outset to work with habitual and committed readers. The group of students with whom I worked, although individually distinctive, did not include avowedly reluctant or disaffected readers, nor students from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. There are, therefore, questions to be raised about how different the findings might be if the same research were undertaken in other contexts. My past experience leads me to suggest – tentatively – that in most classrooms the methods themselves, with their firm pedagogical roots, are robust enough to be replicable. However, they would need to be responsive to local difference and adapted as necessary in order deliberately to attend to (but without prejudice) cultural variation in reading practices, diversity in values attributed to

independent reading and willingness of adult family members to reflect on their own reading histories.

Another limitation is not having built into the design of the research more opportunities to explore with the students what *they* might have learnt about themselves as readers from participating in the project. There are occasional indications that they are reflecting on themselves as readers, for example as they make their collages and represent their trajectories or share their ideas in the small-group interviews or journals. However, it would have been particularly illuminating to ask them what they learnt from conducting interviews with their parents and grandparents and, indeed, to ask the adults for their reflections on the process as well.

Advancing the study of the subject

The most important way in which the research advances thinking in the field is in bringing to bear spatial and historical theoretical perspectives on readers, reading and readership. These, I would argue, provide a potentially very different approach to teaching, learning and assessment of reading in lower secondary school English classes than are currently prevalent, at least in many parts of the UK. Despite the abolition two years ago of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests in English, many schools have quickly replaced the constraints they imposed with other mechanisms for example the system for Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP), or early introduction of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). By contrast, the combination of social, cultural, spatial and historical theoretical perspectives offers a very different way to conceptualise readers, reading and readership, and hence to teach and assess progress. The implications of this reconceptualisation – with each reader seen as having a dynamic, distinctive trajectory, constantly in transformation in the space created by its conjunction with other people's – are potentially profound: for teachers, researchers but – above all – for young readers themselves.

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INTERVIEW GROUPS

Interview group 1	Jade, Charlie, Steve, Elizabeth
Interview group 2	Thomas, Luke, Bekki, Abigail
Interview group 3	Lily, Floella, Zara, Freya
Interview group 4	Lee, Toby, Jessica, Louisa
Interview group 5	Andie, Mehmet, Victoria, Lee (for a 2 nd time)
Interview group 6	Sam, Xavier, Stuart, Chanelle, Nathan

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS

Reading journeys - personal

- What stage are you at right now as a reader and what directions are you heading in?
- Tell me what the experience of being completely absorbed in reading is like from your point of view – whether you're on your own or with other people.

People and texts - social

- Who do you talk with about reading?
- What have been the major influences on you developing a habit of reading? (e.g. books, people, places)

Places, spaces and reasons for reading - cultural

- Where and when do you read?
- What part have libraries, book fairs, book shops played in your commitment to reading?

Schools and teachers- educational

- You've referred a lot to parents, friends and other family members. I wonder how schools and teachers feature.
- I work with people who want to be English teachers and they're very interested to know how committed, habitual readers like you think schools and teachers could best help people to become committed, habitual readers.

Readers as writers

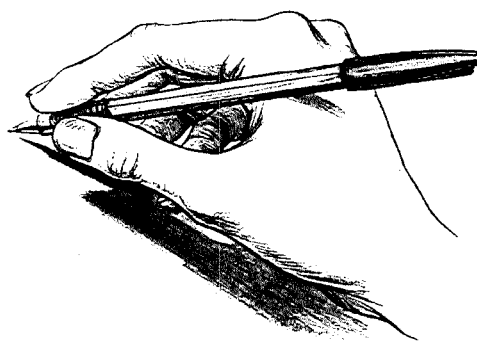
- How does being a writer and writing things for other people to read affect you as a reader?

Rounding off

- Are there any questions you'd like to ask me?
- What name would you like me to use for you in any writing up I do?

READING RESEARCH PROJECT

INTERVIEW NOTES



Interviewer

Interviewee

Please return this booklet and your written-up interview to Mrs
Banbury. Thank you!

To the student

Thank you for taking part in the reading research I did last term. I found the conversations we had really useful. There is an area that I would like to explore further and I am hoping you will be prepared to help out once again. I am trying to discover more about people who have influenced you as a reader - especially parents, carers or grandparents - and what they like to read themselves. If you are willing to take part, here is what to do:

Ask an adult who has been important in your development as a reader whether they are prepared to be interviewed. If they say yes, arrange a time to ask them some questions. See what you can find out about them as a reader, using this booklet to guide you. Make notes during the interview to help you write it up afterwards. If you want to interview more than one adult, that would be great. At the end, please ask the person you have interviewed to sign the form on the next page, giving their consent for me to use their answers to your questions in my research.

If I include ideas from your booklet in my research, I will make sure that made-up names are used for you and anyone you interview to ensure confidentiality. To confirm that you understand about the project, please sign the form below.

I hope you find the task interesting! Thank you very much for taking part. I look forward to reading what you discover.

Gabrielle Cliff Hodges

Reading research project: student consent form
box

Please initial

1. I confirm that I have been told about and understand the information about the interviewing stage of the project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
3. I agree that I will take part in the above project.

Name (block capitals)

Signature Date

To the interviewee

Thank you for taking part in this interview. I am trying to discover more about how parents, carers or grandparents influence young people as readers. The questions ask you to think back to your own experience of being a reader aged 12-13, about yourself as a reader now and your influence on the person interviewing you. If you are willing to take part in this part of the project, here is what it will involve:

The student will arrange a time - when you're not too busy! - to ask some questions about you as a reader. They will jot down some notes during the interview and write them up afterwards. (Further details about the project as a whole were provided last term in a letter which they brought home. You might like to look at it before agreeing to go ahead.)

To confirm that you understand about the project, and if you are happy to take part, please sign the form below, giving your consent for me to use the interview data as part of my reading research. I will make sure that made-up names are used to ensure confidentiality.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to reading what you discover.

Gabrielle Cliff Hodges

Reading research project: interviewee consent form
initial box

Please

1. I confirm that I have been told about and understand the information about the interviewing stage of the project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
3. I agree that I will take part in the above project.

☐☐☐

Name (block capitals)

Signature Date

INTERVIEW NOTES

PART 1 BIOGRAPHY

Some suggested questions

- ☐ Can you tell me about where you grew up and what it was like for you as a young person living there?
- ☐ What are your memories of the secondary school you went to and how far were you encouraged to develop as a reader there?
- ☐ To what extent has reading been important to you in the things you've gone on to do since leaving school?
- ☐ Do you read in connection with your work or any of the hobbies and interests you enjoy?

Other possible questions

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐



PART 2 CURRENT READING

Some suggested questions

- ☐ How would you describe yourself as a reader?
- ☐ What kinds of reading do you most enjoy?
- ☐ What would be the ingredients for your perfect reading experience (where, when, what, why, how)?
- ☐ Can you describe what it is like when you become completely absorbed in what you are reading?

Other possible questions

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐



PART 3 CHILDHOOD READING

Some suggested questions

- ☐ Did you read much as a child? If so, what did you like about reading?
- ☐ What were your most (and least) favourite kinds of reading and where did you get your reading material from?
- ☐ Have you still got any of your books, magazines or comics from then? If so, why have you kept them?
- ☐ Can you tell me some of your most vivid memories of reading when you were growing up?

Other possible questions

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐



PART 4 READING AND OTHER PEOPLE

Some suggested questions

- ☐ When you were young, who influenced you most as a reader or did you just discover things to read for yourself?
- ☐ Nowadays, where do you get ideas about what to read?
- ☐ How would you describe your influence on me as a reader, when I was younger and now?
- ☐ What do you think are some of the similarities and differences between what you used to read when you were my age and the sorts of things I read now?

Other possible questions

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐



PART 5 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Some suggested questions

- ☐ Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience of reading?

Other possible questions

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐



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READING RESEARCH PROJECT

READING JOURNALS

IMAGES REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Keeping a reading journal

During the final weeks of Year 9, you are going to spend some time, in class and for homework, reading one or more books of your own choice as part of your English lessons. You are also going to keep a reading journal. Here are some questions and answers to help you discover more about reading journals.

What can I read?

You could choose to read: a book by a favourite author which you haven't yet read; another book in a favourite series; something you have heard other people talk about and would like to try yourself; a book you think will really challenge you but which you want to try out, perhaps a classic text or the book of a film. You might decide to see whether a book which is stereotyped as 'more for boys' or 'more for girls' really is so by reading it for yourself rather than relying on other people's opinions. You can read fiction or non-fiction - whichever you prefer.

What is a reading journal?

A reading journal is a place where you can jot down your ideas about the reading you are doing. It consists of a series of entries, much like diary entries, in which you write about not just what you are reading, but the process of reading as well. By the time you have finished, you will have created a permanent record of your thoughts and ideas as you work your way through the book.

When are the best times to write a journal entry?

The best times to write a journal entry are just before and just after you have read a section of the book. Before you begin reading, you can comment on why you feel like reading your book right now or predict what you think might happen next. After you have read some more of your book, you can reflect on what you have read and how far your predictions were met.

There are many other aspects of books and reading which you might like to comment on in your journal e.g.

- Why you have chosen the book
- What you can tell from the front cover and the blurb
- What you think the book is going to be like
- Whether you are in the mood for reading or not
- Whether you are in the right place for reading or not
- Where you imagine yourself to be when you are absorbed in the book
- What you saw in your mind's eye when you imagined the plot, setting, characters
- Anything that puzzles you or raises questions in your mind



Appendix 5: Student reading journal guidance

- What you think about the characters or themes of the book
- How the plot is being worked out
- What you like or dislike about the way the book is structured or written
- How your earlier predictions have worked out
- What you think and feel about the way the book ends
- Anything you are interested to look up whilst reading e.g. in a dictionary or on Wikipedia

How are reading journals written?

Reading journals are an opportunity for people to share their views about reading in a very informal way. They can later be referred back to when writing more formal, considered book reviews, but the real interest of a journal lies in capturing fleeting moments which might otherwise be forgotten.

Reading journal entries are usually written quickly and immediately and are therefore quite conversational in style. They need to be clearly written, though, because you want other people to be able to read them as well. There is no set length for a reading journal entry. At times you may want to write more e.g. if something is puzzling or intriguing you. At other times, you may want to write very little because all you want to do is find out what happens next!

Here are some examples of the sorts of things people write as journal entries. They are a selection written by a class who were reading a book called *Gaffer Samson's Luck* by Jill Paton Walsh:-

We have to read a book called *Gaffer Samson's Luck*. It sounds boring because there are no secret alien bases, no tripods striding across the skyline and no UFOs zapping people's brains. The blurb tells us that there is a hunt for an ancient luck charm.

It looks a bit boring from the pictures inside. I don't think it's my sort of book. I am in a sort of reading mood but I would rather read my own book.

I'm looking forward to reading *Gaffer Samson's Luck* because I want to know what's wrong with Gaffer and whether James will become friends with Angey... I think Angey will help James find the luck and they'll turn out to be best friends.

This part of the story was good and I liked the biking part. In the bit about biking I imagined that I was riding my bike round all the country roads near St Neots and Eaton Socon because I go on ten mile rides sometimes when the weather is nice.

Today when we read the book I really could imagine myself being there like when they were on their bikes I could imagine myself being a cameraman going along with them and watching them ride.

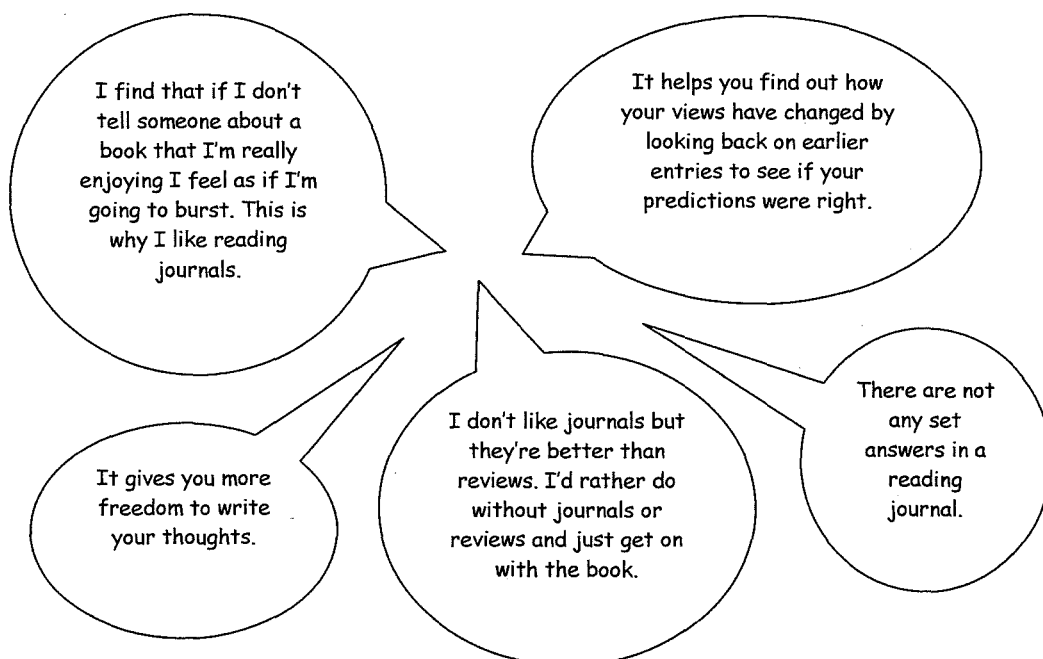
I don't feel like reading much today because I am tired and have ridden to school in the wind and rain and I've got a headache.

Quite good. Differs from what I expected. I am really into the book now and I love it. I hate the school and the village and estate playground. I envy and love James's room.

Appendix 5: Student reading journal guidance

Your reading journals can be written in the books provided. These books have alternate lined and plain pages since many of you may want to draw or stick things in. However, if you want to use your own notebooks instead, or write on computer and print it out afterwards, that's fine.

Not everyone enjoys writing journals, but it's difficult to tell whether you do or don't without having a go. Here are some Year 9 students' views:



When you have tried keeping your own journal, you can see whether you agree with those students or not.

What is the point of keeping a reading journal?

Whether or not you end up enjoying the process of keeping a journal remains to be seen. Either way, your journal may prove interesting to read back over, as a record of your reading experience on this particular occasion.

For your teacher, your journal entries may provide interesting, perhaps unexpected, insights into your identity as a reader. For researchers, your journal will provide fascinating evidence of what a person of your age thinks and feels, when reading a particular book at a particular time in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Your journal, once written, becomes permanent (assuming it doesn't get lost!). Who knows who might read it in future and what an interesting record it will provide of one young person's independent reading in the summer of 2008. Good luck!

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Reading Journals

IMAGES REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY



Dear Sam

Many thanks indeed for letting me read your journal. You've written a really detailed account of what sounds like an extremely exciting book. I enjoyed reading your comments and could quite see why you found *Polar Shift* such a gripping read.

Although you wrote that you expected the book to be boring because it belongs to your dad, you didn't say why! Was it because you weren't sure what to expect? Either way, you're no doubt glad to know that you like this particular book and that if you want to read others by Clive Cussler he's written plenty more from which you can choose!

I really liked the drawings you did in the journal, especially since they matched what you were writing about. They give a good sense of what you were seeing in your mind's eye at the time. All in all, I've found this very interesting to read. Thank you.

Gabrielle

November 2008

Keeping a reading journal

Following the excellent interviews you carried out with parents and grandparents, there is one final area I would like to research and I am hoping some of you will be prepared to participate. In your English lessons, you are going to be reflecting on your own independent reading by keeping a reading journal.

If you are happy for me to read and use your journal as part of my research, on the same basis as all the previous stages of this research project, I will once again make sure that made-up names are used for you to ensure confidentiality. To confirm that you understand, please sign the form below.

I hope you find keeping a journal interesting!

Gabrielle Cliff Hodges

Reading research project: student consent form

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have been told about and understand the information about the reading journal stage of the project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
3. I agree that I will take part in the above project.

☐☐☐

Name (block capitals)

Signature Date

Gabrielle Cliff Hodges MA
Senior Lecturer



09 May 2007

Dear

Reading research project

It was very good of you to give up your time last Thursday to come and chat about my research plans. I'm really pleased that you're interested in being involved in a pilot study with your Year 8 class. Since it would be timely to get started fairly soon, I've thought through further what we discussed and drawn up an outline below. Let me know if you still think it sounds OK!

Background to the research

A working title for my proposed research is:

'A study of 12-13 year olds who are habitual, committed readers: what, how and why they read, and the social, cultural and educational factors which influence their development'.

Whilst a great deal of emphasis has been placed nationally on young people who appear *not* to become habitual, committed readers, I am keen to discover more about those who *do*. A working definition of 'habitual and committed readers' (albeit rather unwieldy!) might be: 'those who regularly and voluntarily read and engage with a variety of texts for a range of purposes, with the expectation that their reading will often be pleasurable and/or interesting'.

I hope that the research will cover a number of different aspects of reading including

- the range and construction of texts young people read, literary and non-literary, in a variety of media
- their perceptions of being readers – personal, social and cultural – and accounts of what happens during the reading process
- their attitudes towards reading and reading practices in a variety of social, cultural and educational contexts

Recent research into reading habits has tended to be on a large scale with wide-angle views. I am keen to undertake research which offers close-up perspectives, specifically those of individual young readers.

The pilot study

In the pilot study, I intend to use research methods embedded within good English teaching practice, to see how successfully they enable the identification of individual readers who might form the ultimate case studies. The classroom activities will, I trust, be valuable in their own right, as well as research methods which yield useful data.

Research methods

Because my three areas of interest (in the bullet points above) cover deep-rooted and interconnected issues, the research methods I propose need to capture something of that complexity. Below are three of the ideas we discussed.

(i) Reading histories

To encourage students to reflect deeply on their own reading histories, we will ask them to 'map' the reading journeys they have so far made, from their earliest memories to the present day. The activity will begin in an English lesson, set up by you and observed by me, with the opportunity to talk with and listen to students whilst they work. We discussed using a method sometimes referred to as 'Rivers of experience – critical incident charts'. Students will be asked to reflect on their development as readers, visualising their progress as a river (or suitable equivalent) in which each bend of the river represents an critical stage.

Setting up the reading histories will need to include some indication of what we understand by the word *reading*; an explanation that we are interested in everything they read, not just fiction; ideas about how they might draw their 'maps'. In order to ensure that students are encouraged to consider all facets of themselves as readers, it will be important to try not to over-emphasise any particular reading preferences in case it unwittingly leads them to play down their own.

They could be encouraged to carry out further research at home e.g. by looking again at some of the first texts they read (if they've still got them at home) and by asking others (e.g. parents or grandparents) to recall relevant information that they were too young to remember. The 'maps' can always be added to outside the lesson. They will also be useful prompts in the later small-group interviews.

We touched on, but didn't decide, what to do if any students want to supplement their 'maps' with written reflections (e.g. in their reading journals?). It would be great if they did, but perhaps we need to discuss whether you would see it as voluntary or something they all might be encouraged to do.

(ii) Identifying habitual committed readers

The second stage will be to identify students within the class who are 'habitual and committed' readers. As well as using the reading histories as evidence, we could draw on your own knowledge of their reading. It will be particularly important to ask the students too, using the working definition to see how far they think it describes them and/or whether they want to amend the definition at all to make it more realistic or inclusive. I'm keen to be inclusive and to encourage them to be positive, in the hopes that as many as possible will identify themselves and be keen to participate in the next stage of the project.

(iii) Small-group conversations

The third stage of the pilot would be for me to carry out small-group conversations with the students who had identified themselves as habitual and committed readers. The conversations would be structured around a small number of key questions and refer to the reading history 'maps' as and when relevant. The aim would be to probe more deeply to discover more about the students' perceptions, attitudes and experiences, creating an ever

Appendix 8: Class teacher letter and consent form

more detailed picture of each as an individual reader. In my experience of these kinds of conversations to date, the process of talking has proved to be an extremely important part of the research process. To that end, I would like to use video, if possible, to acquire a visual record as well. Facial expressions and body language can be a revealing aspect of students' responses so I would appreciate the option to include them in my analysis.

At this point, if these activities had worked, I would hope to have identified readers who could form the basis of some case studies. At the moment, it is not my intention to pursue the pilot study beyond these preliminary stages. However, we could always see how things turn out and agree to explore further if it looks promising!

Participants' consent

I would very much appreciate it if I could ask for consent from the parents of the whole class. If any wish to withhold it, then their children's work will obviously not be included; the conversation groups will be selected from amongst those whose parents do give their consent. Attached are some draft documents for you to look at and see if you think they're appropriate. If so, let me know how many copies of the letter and consent form you would like me to run off and I can do it and drop them off at school for you by return. If you think they need amending first, I'll be happy to make whatever changes you advise. Assuming that the timescale is not too tight, I'll plan to join you for your Year 8 English lesson next Wednesday (May 16th) period 2, as we discussed. Shall I bring crayons, paper etc. for them to use when drawing their 'maps'?

If there's any further information that either you or the school need at this stage, please just email me back and I'll gladly offer it.

Gabrielle

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Project:

Reading research project

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information about the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

2. I understand that the school's participation is voluntary and that we are free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

☐

3. I agree that I will take part in the above project.

☐

4. I *wish/ do not wish* my name to be changed in all project dissemination material (delete as applicable).

☐

Name of Teacher

Date

Signature

Appendix 9: Parent/carer letter and consent form

Gabrielle Cliff Hodges MA
Senior Lecturer



11 May 2007

Dear Parent/Carer

Reading research project

Your child is being invited to take part in a research project on reading, taking place as part of the class's English lessons. Before you decide whether or not your child can take part, it is important to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

What is the purpose of the project?

As part of my doctoral research, I am undertaking a study of 12-13 year olds who are habitual, committed readers. I am interested to discover more about what, how and why they read, and the social, cultural and educational factors which influence their development as readers. Much attention has been paid to young people who don't or won't read; less has been paid to those who do. I am hoping to build up a picture of young people who regularly and voluntarily read, who engage with a variety of texts for a range of purposes with the expectation that their reading will be pleasurable and interesting.

Why has my child been chosen?

[Cornford] Village College has been approached because of the relationship forged between myself and your child's English teacher who has also agreed to take part.

Does my child have to take part?

The whole class will be doing work on reading since it is an essential part of the English Curriculum and the lessons are based on this alone. It is up to you to decide whether or not your child takes part in the accompanying research project. If you decide you do not want them to take part, it will not mean withdrawing from these invaluable lessons or the work done in them, just from the subsequent small-group discussions (although these are fully intended to provide a valuable opportunity for students to reflect on their reading) and from any use of their work for research purposes. If you decide s/he can take part you are still free to withdraw her/him from the project at any time, without needing to give a reason.

What will taking part involve?

Your child's English teacher will introduce activities which encourage students to reflect on their reading histories and whether they consider themselves to be habitual and committed

Appendix 9: Parent/carer letter and consent form

readers. I will then set up and lead small-group conversations with only those who have consented to take part in the research project. Methods for collecting data will include:

- Observations
- Small-group conversations
- Video-filming and/or audio-recording the small-group conversations
- Interviews with the teacher
- Collecting and analysing students' work

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Participants will have the opportunity to be involved in activities which it is hoped will yield insights into reading which are of value both to the students themselves as well as to English teachers.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

One possible disadvantage is that your child might not like the idea of being filmed whilst in a small-group discussion. We will ask students' permission before filming takes place.

Will my child's details be kept confidential?

The names of all students will be changed to ensure confidentiality. The school may decide that the school's name will remain the same in any reports of the project.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

Outcomes from the pilot may be shared in academic or educational contexts in the form of a conference presentation or an article in an academic journal. If so, all students' names will be changed to ensure confidentiality.

If you would like any further information about the research, please get in touch. My contact details are given below. Otherwise, I would be most grateful if you would complete and return the attached consent form. Many thanks for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Gabrielle Cliff Hodges

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Project:

Reading research project

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

2. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that he/ she is free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

☐

3. I agree that my child will take part in the above project.

☐

Name of Parent/Carer

Date

Signature

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Project:

Reading research project

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have been told about and understand the information about the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. ☐
3. I agree that I will take part in the above project. ☐

Name of Student

Date

Signature

Reading Research Interview

The interview notes you took and the write-up you've done from them give a lovely clear sense of your Nan as a reader. It sounds as if her school was influential, but it was also important having such good access to books. What a treat to be able to just walk to the nearby library! For many keen readers, the chance to choose what to read and have the pleasure of discovering books for themselves is really important. It's sometimes a bit harder to achieve if you don't have easy access to a library.

I always find it interesting to see what people say their favourite books were when they were young, but their least favourites are fascinating, too. I know just what your Nan means about *The Water Babies* (though I did find it more readable than I expected when I eventually got round to it again as an adult!).

What you've managed to convey really well from the interview overall is your Nan's huge enthusiasm for reading. It's not always easy to translate the tone of a conversation into writing, but you've done so very effectively so I've really enjoyed reading this. Thank you!

Gabrielle Cliff Hodges
February 2008

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

(adapted from those used by Phonology of Contemporary English <http://w3.pac.univ-tlse2.fr/conventions.htm>)

Turn taking

At the beginning of each turn the speaker is identified by his/her pseudonym followed by a colon. The researcher is designated by the initials GCH. Overlapping turns, background responses and other fillers are common features of small-group discussions. Transcribing them makes extracts very challenging to read. Instead, I have chosen to draw attention to these features in the form of parenthetical remarks but only in cases where they contribute in an explicitly 'marked' way to the discussion.

Simplified punctuation

The full stop, comma, apostrophe and question mark are the only punctuation marks used. Commas indicate a brief pause in the discourse or separate repeated words or expressions. Full stops stand for a relatively long pause in the discourse. An exceptionally long pause in an otherwise coherent sequence is indicated by a parenthetical remark. A question mark is inserted at the end of a question.

Repetition

Repeated words or expressions are separated by a comma.

Parentheses

Observations by the transcriber on non-linguistic aspects of the interaction (noises, stammering, laughter, who a comment is directed to etc.) or recording (background action, quality problems) are placed between parentheses, as necessary.

Reported speech

Reported speech is transcribed between inverted commas (' ').

Omissions

Omitted sections of transcript are marked with three dots ...

Ellipsis

Instances of ellipsis are occasionally replaced by words in square brackets for ease of reading.